

POWER, BOUNDARIES AND FIELDWORK

William J. Foltz

I approached the task of setting forth my intellectual trajectory as a daunting challenge. 'Trajectory' evokes an image of a clean parabolic throw, a peg from center field to home plate, a crisp single path. As I reviewed my intellectual past, I found more of a muddle, straddling the boundaries between disciplines and sub-disciplines, between pure academic work and government analytic and policy work, between US centered and international work. Out of this muddle, I have found more connections and consistency than I had expected. I'll deal particularly with two core ideas, Power and Boundary, and one research setting, Fieldwork.

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I did my undergraduate work at Princeton (class of 1957) with my junior year in France. I majored in French literature under the interdisciplinary Special Program in European Civilization. My courses in France included seventeenth century literature, art history and, at the *Institut d'Études Politiques*, political philosophy and the politics of the French Third Republic. (In preparing for the oral examination on the Third Republic I recall memorizing the names of all 101 Prime Ministers, from Thiers to Daladier, staying up into the dawn with a fellow student who two years later became my wife). My reading of Albert Camus (particularly his journalism) and the inescapable background reality of the Algerian war drew me into disputes over the legitimacy of colonial rule and the arbitrary definitions of French citizenship and Muslim identity. I became aware that far from the Latin Quarter there existed a Plus Grande France – the colonies linked to the '*metropole*'.

During my senior year back at Princeton, I was captivated by the study of medieval French (under the gentle persuasion of Alfred Foulet) and I started to apply to Yale's Medieval Studies Program. Then the outside world rudely intruded. The autumn of 1956 brought Hungarians into the streets to protest Soviet domination, only to be crushed by Soviet tanks. Meanwhile, in defiance of American policy, France, Britain and Israel launched an invasion of Egypt in an attempt to regain control over the Suez Canal. I decided that there were some things going on in the world that might be more important than any contribution I might make to the study of medieval French, and I wanted to be involved, to make a difference. A young faculty member recommended Yale's International Relations program on the totally erroneous inside information that the renowned international relations scholar, Hans Morgenthau, was being hired by Yale. My intention was to stay one year at Yale, all I could afford, and then join the Foreign Service.

I wanted to study something new and different at Yale, and I had become fascinated by John Gunther's best-seller, *Inside Africa*. For all of my fascination with Africa, my knowledge base was strictly limited, but then, I reasoned, such was the case of almost everyone else. My ignorance would stand out less starkly. I scoured Yale's

catalog for courses with some relevance to African affairs and spent long hours in the stacks at Sterling Library. I found Africa-relevant angles for term papers in most of my courses, whether or not they dealt specifically with the 'Dark Continent'. As it turned out, Yale, too, was beginning to think about Africa and the shortage of young scholars working on Africa, and when, at the end of the first term, the Dean called me to his office, it was not to throw me out, but to encourage my interest in Africa by giving me a fellowship.

So what, if anything, did this 21 year old bring to the study of international relations, political science, or Africa? I had good French and a familiarity with how French institutions do things. From the French I had learned to do classic explication de texte, and this was complemented by exposure to the skills of "close reading" from Princeton's R.P. Blackmur and Lawrence Thompson. This literary background served me well in decoding the ambiguities and hidden meanings of African political speech.

The French connection influenced me in many ways. My first course devoted entirely to Africa was Harry Rudin's course on African History. Harry was known as "Black Harry" as much for his persistently gloomy outlook on the world, as for his subject matter. Rudin began the first class meeting by going around the table and dividing the continent by its colonial boundaries. Each student had to take special responsibility for one particular colony. I was eager to work on the Belgian Congo, which Gunther had called "an extremely important country not only to Belgium and Africa but to the world" and where my French would give me an advantage. Alas, the young lady before me seized the Congo for herself. I floundered a bit and then took French West Africa, only half aware that I had thus chosen a federation of eight different colonies. My first paper, eventually chapter five of my dissertation, dealt with the political intrigues in France and Africa that determined that the federal level of government was not strong enough to withstand the attractions of local micro nationalism.

Whatever enthusiasm and literary training I brought to graduate study, I had everything to learn about political science, and Yale was the place to learn it. Building on the work of Chicago's Charles Merriam, Yale's political science department had become a center of the "behavioral approach". The behavioralists strove for the rigor of the natural scientists, or at least their aura. They preferred quantitative over qualitative analysis, empirical analysis over the normative or philosophical or legalistic. "Power" was a hotly contested concept, but one central to the work of scholars like Harold Lasswell, Nathan Leites, Robert E. Lane, and Robert Dahl.

In the 1940's, sociologists had annexed Power to their intellectual empires. C. Wright Mills and Floyd Hunter sought out the "power elite" who, they supposed, really called the shots through their ability to translate social and economic status into political power. Dahl in particular challenged this as simplistic. One should not just suppose that status determined power, one must find out in detail how binding decisions are made, over which subjects, by whom, when? This required empirical research of a detailed sort, not supposition. Students in Dahl's seminar were given

the opportunity to do some of the empirical digging for a book he was writing on power in New Haven. I leapt at the opportunity and was given the task of interviewing a variety of New Haveners who had been involved in the unsuccessful attempt to reform the City's Charter. My subjects ranged from the president of a bank, to the formidable president of the League of Women Voters, to the head of the Firemen's Union, who was a key actor in the Charter's defeat. To get this information and judge its weight, I had to elicit the cooperation of people from a variety of social settings. I learned quickly how to interview and to build a network of informants. To the surprise of many social scientists it turned out that most important decisions were made by elected officials, senior bureaucrats, and those with a particular axe to grind.

The behavioralists' emphasis on empirical and quantitative work was seen as a professional challenge by many of those protecting the "softer" side of political science. Ironically, the most impassioned attacks came from the political philosophers at the University of Chicago. Yet a few years later, most of the accomplishments of the behavioral approach had been assimilated into the mainstream of political science so that new graduate students wondered what all the fuss had been about.

My work with Dahl, like most of the behaviorist projects, dealt with American politics and with politics at the micro level, but my interest in international relations continued to be primary. I married a thoroughly international woman – a well-traveled French-speaking Norwegian-American. My international relations courses brought me under the spell of Karl Deutsch, who quickly convinced me that academia offered a career at least as exciting and useful as the diplomatic service, and who became my dissertation advisor. Deutsch was bursting with ideas and projects. His major work had been the study and measurement of nationalism through the communication links among various peoples and the attempts to construct federal or other supra-national security communities. Deutsch's ingenious ideas on how to measure peoples' social and political commitments fit right in with the behavioralists' enthusiasm for quantification. He scrutinized attempts to preserve or create federal structures, to advance or oppose ethnic mobilization, and how nation-building might arise. All of these problematized the unit of analysis: neither the nation nor the state might be relevant goals or actors. Boundaries were contested and many were changed.

In the late 1950's, France's African colonies, spurred by the Algerian revolt, were going through rapid and dramatic changes. Boundary and unit of analysis issues were critical. What should be the basic political unit? Traditional or tribal boundaries? Colonial boundaries? And then for the eight colonies of France's West African Federation, should they all cling together? Or should there be two or more smaller federations? Or should they fold into a greater pan-African unity, or a greater French community including the *Mère-Patrie* and all its colonial appendages? France's president, Charles DeGaulle, and some key African leaders came to prefer the colonial boundaries, though they accepted that two colonies, Senegal and French Soudan, might form a federation, baptized the Mali Federation, when they gained indepen-

dence in June 1960. This struck me as a perfect subject for a dissertation. It combined comparative politics and international relations, Deutsch-style communications measurement, textual analysis, and lots of fieldwork, interviewing political actors and just hanging around with people who talked politics. Although I learned a smattering of Wolof and Bambara, the most common African languages of Senegal and Soudan, French was their official language and it was my working language.

Alas, the Mali Federation had the ill grace to collapse in bitter recriminations while my wife, Anne-Marie and I were on the boat from Bordeaux to Dakar. So my subject changed from ‘Why was the Federation formed?’ to ‘Why did it collapse so quickly?’ The popular view credited the Federation’s failure to French machinations, with a view toward Balkanizing Africa into mini-states which would be abjectly dependent on Paris. *Le Monde* credited the American CIA with the dirty deed, as part of Washington’s supposed plot to take over France’s empire. Now, France and the US have many sins to atone for in Africa, but this was not one. The Mali Federation was formed and destroyed by individual African political leaders, each choosing the political boundary that would maximize his own chances of holding on to, or increasing, his political power.

Let me tell a story about a fieldwork encounter that illustrates unusual relations of power and the problematic nature of boundaries. In 1961 when I was doing fieldwork in Senegal, among the political actors I sought to interview were the *marabouts* (*serigne* in Wolof). These were Sufi Muslims credited with exceptional piety and accorded great standing in the community, true leaders of men with whom the colonial regime and its African successors had to come to terms. One of the most difficult to approach was Ibrahima Niass whose home and base of operations was Kaolack, capital of one of Senegal’s chief peanut producing regions who did not regularly come to Dakar. I eventually got to know Ibrahima Niass’s Dakar business manager. He arranged for me to call on Serigne the next afternoon at his Dakar residence, Avenue El Hadj Malik Sy. I recognized the address as that of a large, rambling, somewhat ramshackle building where men in white khaftans and knitted skullcaps wandered in and out seemingly at random. Not being sure what to expect, I put on my interview suit and sober tie and prepared for the experience. Ibrahima Niass was known to have two or three hundred thousand adepts (*talibes* in Wolof) in Senegal and about ten times as many elsewhere in West Africa, principally in Northern Nigeria. He also was known for being able to deliver Kaolack’s votes and influence political outcomes in other West African countries. Surely he would have things to tell me about the Mali Federation if I could establish a good relationship with him.

I was ushered into a largish square room bare of furniture except for an iron-ribbed bed on which Ibrahima Niass was perched. He gestured to me to come and sit on the bed alongside him, a distinct honor. I was glad I had put on a suit and tie for the occasion. Serigne Niass’s business manager had by now appeared and sat cross-legged on the floor in front of us. Serigne smiled. He was a rotund, white-bearded

man of sixty plus years—a jolly black Santa Claus, I said to myself. The business manager interpreted what each of us said into passable French. I thought Ibrahima Niass spoke adequate French, but recognized the West African ploy whereby a chief or king would speak only indirectly, through his “linguist,” thereby assuring that the great man would not seem to say anything unfortunate. There were, however, some problems about the seating arrangements. Ibrahima Niass weighed in at about 225 pounds; I reached 135 pounds dripping wet, which I was in that hot and airless room. I was constantly sliding downhill into Serigne’s lap, and then climbing up the sagging mattress. What a great way to keep a nosy interviewer off his stride!

We conversed easily nonetheless, covering the major points of West African politics, including his version of how the Mali Federation collapsed. He asked me about Muslims in the United States, and the recent American elections. He explained some of the difficulties arising from a prominent Nigerian talibe’s insistence that Serigne add one of the Nigerian’s daughters to the already substantial number of Serigne’s wives and showed me a letter from Ghana’s President, Kwame Nkrumah, thanking Serigne for intervening with Senegal’s president Senghor on behalf of Guinea’s Sekou Toure. It was Nkrumah who gave Serigne Niass his black Chevrolet Impala convertible, the fanciest auto in all Senegal. This clearly was a man who operated on the grand scale, crossing many boundaries in the process.

After we had been talking for quite some time, out of the corner of my eye I saw a door open, but I saw no one come in. Then I saw him. A white-clad man was lying flat on his belly pulling himself along the floor with one arm, while the other held up a glass of water. He stopped in front of Ibrahima Niass who took several sips of water, each time putting the glass in the man’s upright hand like a garden party glass holder. Then Serigne nudged the man in the ribs with his foot, and the talibe backed out as he had come in. Wow, I said to myself, that’s Power! Or at least one type of power, able to influence events across the whole of West Africa.

I returned to New Haven to write my dissertation and began teaching as an Acting Instructor, the very bottom of Yale’s teaching ranks. As Anne-Marie was well on her way to giving birth to our first child, I was gratified that the informal job market of the time produced some attractive inquiries. In addition to one from the CIA typed on blank paper telling me that “Professor Rudin has suggested that you might be interested in government employ,” I considered seriously a joint offer from UCLA and the RAND Corporation that would have paid me more than twice my Yale salary and would have put me into the policy think-tank world that was closer to the international world of action that had drawn me to Yale in the first place. But Yale won out. The new Yale Provost, Kingman Brewster, painted a bright picture of how Yale was going to increase its international teaching and research, (and by the way salaries were going to go up). Robert Dahl, by now the Political Science chairman, reminded me of the pure intellectual joys of scholarship, and Karl Deutsch’s support included collaborating with me in editing a book on nation building. But above all Anne-Marie

and I decided that for all California's charms, we both disliked the Freeway culture, and that clinched our decision to start my career in New Haven.

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As I settled into my dual professional identity as political scientist and Africanist, I took as a major responsibility of my teaching and scholarship, to adapt social science to the proper study of Africa, and not the reverse. This entailed getting the analytic categories right and understanding how Africans perceived and interpreted the world around them. Content analysis of all sorts of politically relevant speech helped me make sense of the interviews I conducted in the field. I watched how power was distributed, nurtured and disguised, how ambitious men built institutions to serve their purposes in a rapidly changing political world.

Others approached the study of Africa and other parts of the Third World with different associations. Dependency theory, a watered down version of Marxism based on Lenin's Imperialism, sought to explain the actions of Third World countries by the constraints put upon them by external forces on which they were forced to depend. I was dissatisfied with any theoretical approach that denied agency to those on the ground. Dependency theory had a greater appeal to Latin Americanist scholars than it did to Africanists, though fears that newly independent African states would be dominated by "neo-colonialist" forces had wide currency among African students and some politicians.

Modernization theory presented a more serious intellectual challenge. It was not so much a theory as a deep-seated set of assumptions of distinguished ancestry. Among the intellectual forefathers one would count Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and the many inspired by their visions of society shifting from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, from mechanical to organic solidarity, from traditional to rational-legal authority. Their assumptions provided a base for wide-ranging analysis that spoke to a wide variety of social scientists. For American political scientists, the major statement came in a series of volumes commissioned by the Social Science Research Council and led by Gabriel Almond. Other names included Edward Shils, Alex Inkeles, Walt Rostow, Daniel Lerner, James Coleman, and many others. Their basic understanding was that there was a common path that led from "traditional" ways of thinking, acting, and organizing, to "modern" ways. Karl Deutsch made a major contribution with his Social Mobilization model, whereby static traditional societies reacting to some external shock would stimulate a revolution of rising expectations, which would propel them along a modernizing path. No longer would the backward peasantry react stolidly like (in Marx's formulation) a "sack of potatoes." They would begin to think for themselves in ways that broke society free from the inefficient ways of traditional life. There would be setbacks, but once started, history could take over and bit by bit the virus of modernity would spread throughout the body politic.

Stimulating as I had found the social mobilization model to be, in an act of academic patricide, I pointed out its limitations in the lead contribution to a festschrift volume in Karl's honor. These limitations might generally be described as failure to include agency in the actions of the non-mobilized (the traditional society problem),

the acceptance of the nation-state as the *telos* of political action (the unit of analysis problem), and the ability of political actors to create institutions that magnify the power of an individual or group.

An example illustrating the pitfalls involved in misunderstanding responses to seemingly straightforward questions posed by an unaware social scientist can be drawn from the massive project of Inkeles and David Horton Smith. This sought to understand what was involved for the individual who was "becoming modern" and devised measures to determine degree of modernity. These measures were problematic.

Question: What is the most important thing for the future of the country?

The hard work of the people.

Good government planning:

God's help:

Good luck.

An inexperienced fieldworker might expect a "modernizing" peasant to pick a. or b. and would code answers c. and d. as revealing a traditional or backward mentality. However, the thoughtful peasant might dismiss a. and b. out of hand, as he knows that he and his fellows have been working as hard as possible for generations with little to show for their pains. For this thoughtful peasant, "Government planning" might charitably be considered an oxymoron. Finally, this same peasant might know that crops are dependant on good rainfall ("God's Help" or "Good Luck"), and that cannot be produced by government and its venal agents.

Since the 1970's, improvements in fieldwork techniques have led to greater understanding of the context of communication in third world settings and of the hazards of interpreting responses to questions posed by unreflected research design. The African international consortium of opinion pollsters, known as Afrobarometer, has faced up to the challenge of interviewing in Africa and is turning out excellent work.

Political Science is now undergoing a culture war. The insurgents, borrowing from the economists, seek to use game theory and strong assumptions of rational action to replace the more nuanced exploration of culture. Many political scientists and even more Africanists perceive this as a repudiation of the subtle understanding of basic fieldwork and close observation. Yet, some of the best African politics studies of recent years have used a rational choice framework. Robert Bates and David Laitin, for example, have done nuanced work enriched by micro-economic methods of analysis. Of course, these men had spent long years doing classic fieldwork before annexing "rational choice" to their skill set. I am comfortable with much of this new literature, stripped of its more far-reaching claims, though I am poorly equipped to use these tools myself. I comfort myself with the expectation that, like behavioralism before it, rational choice modeling will be absorbed into the mainstream of the discipline, so that in a decade new graduate students will ask 'what was all the fuss about?'

I should mention other forms my professional work has taken. Through most of my career, with a variety of security clearances and the informal approval of a suc-

cession of Yale Provosts, I consulted on African matters with the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and eventually the National Intelligence Council. Much of the work I did for the government was close to what I would be doing as an academic, and some of it saw the light of day through scholarly publication without significant substantive alteration. The government connection had the side benefit of increasing and refining my knowledge of how the United States made policy toward Africa. This became a supplemental field of teaching and writing.

One exception to the purely analytic work I did for the government came in 1978 when the State Department asked me to deliver a message from Mozambique's President Samora Machel to Bishop Muzorewa. Machel was a key African supporter of the Patriotic Front armed rebellion against the white regime in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe); Muzorewa had significant support, particularly among the Shona people. I had met the Bishop when he spent several months at the Yale Divinity School pondering whether or not he should commit his followers to the rebellion, or whether he might get a better deal by accepting South African money and cutting a deal with Ian Smith's government. Machel's message was an invitation for Muzorewa to join Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe in the Patriotic Front. For obscure reasons of diplomatic and guerrilla protocol, it was decided between the State Department and President Machel that the message should be delivered by an American, but not by an *official* American. I fit the bill and waited a week dodging Ian Smith's secret police while the Bishop zipped off to the UN to raise his international profile. By now I had gotten to know most of the Bishop's colleagues and had no trouble meeting him at his house following a boisterous welcome home rally. The Bishop's son delivered a reply the next morning, a courteous but flat turndown, which I carried back to Machel. As Zimbabwe fell into chaos under Mugabe's egregious misrule, I sometimes wondered whether it would have made a difference if the Bishop had accepted the invitation.

In the mid 1990's, I spent two years in Washington as the National Intelligence Officer for Africa, in effect the senior analyst for African affairs in the intelligence community. The signature work of an NIO is to prepare a National Intelligence Estimate, representing the collective view of the entire intelligence community on a significant problem. These are, by government standards, long documents, sometimes as long as fifty pages. I found that these seldom were read by decision-makers. I concentrated on personal contacts with decision-makers and on backing up the Director of Central Intelligence in sub-cabinet and inter-agency meetings where it was possible to shape how senior policy-makers thought about Africa. Traveling in Africa with the Director let me do fieldwork of a privileged sort.

The African military has been another focus of research and policy-making. I ran a series of workshops for African senior civil servants and military officers on the role of the military in democratization. It was a new fieldwork challenge to penetrate African military cultures. I found that getting civilian leaders to be knowledgeable about

the military's legitimate problems was often a neglected task. Maintaining civilian control required civilian leaders to know something about military affairs. When they did not, disaster usually followed.

Yet another set of multi-disciplinary projects dealt directly with issues of boundary and power in a constructed fieldwork situation. In 1968, with a social psychologist (Leonard Doob) and an international lawyer (Robert Stevens), I brought together in an isolated Italian mountain hotel a group of elite Somalis, Kenyans and Ethiopians with the task of thinking up solutions to the border conflicts afflicting the Horn of Africa. The project was aptly codenamed "Wild Idea." We worked with the assistance of experienced group psychodynamics specialists to break down cultural and other barriers to frank and creative thought and report back to their governments and to the United Nations, which gave us quiet support. We did not solve the Somali border problem, which continues to defy the best efforts of the international community to this day.

Three years later, Doob and I organized a comparable intervention in Northern Ireland, which brought together mostly working class activists, Catholics and Protestants, on the neutral ground of a Scottish university. We hoped to promote a process of communication and understanding across the deep cleavages in that society. In retrospect, our intervention was one of many, official and non-official, that created an atmosphere in which the two sides, eventually assisted by the powerful work of Senator George Mitchell and President Bill Clinton, seem finally to have reached a solution.

Thinking back over this muddled trajectory, I am surprised to find that I have made the linkage between scholarship and international and government service that I had been looking for when I was fresh out of college and beginning my graduate studies. My work has continued to draw from many academic disciplines and schools of thought.

Yale provided a supportive platform for these activities. When not away doing fieldwork in Africa or elsewhere, I spent a fair amount of time administering various Yale activities. I helped build the African Studies program and was its chair for ten years. For seven years I directed the Yale Center for international and Area Studies, now the Macmillan Center, and chaired other interdisciplinary programs. Not surprisingly, I took special interest in raising money to subsidize faculty and graduate student fieldwork. Most of this work was interdisciplinary, a way of crossing or enlarging boundaries. I had started out in an interdisciplinary program as an undergraduate, and I muddled along to work with scholars and government analysts, to cross boundaries and exercise ...not power, but the arcane techniques of getting something done at Yale, and occasionally in Washington.

I conclude with a short list of rules for doing fieldwork in Africa:

Distrust any analytic scheme that would have you and others like you at the top of some scale, be that modernization, brilliance, or sanctity;

Be aware that power comes in many guises, only some of them fungible and able to cross boundaries;

If you are going to do serious fieldwork in Africa, be sure you have a venturesome and tolerant spouse;

If your fieldwork involves a long stay in a country that is poverty-stricken and hot, be sure that the French once colonized it. That way there will be one store in the capital city that stocks a dozen varieties of cheese, decent wine, and that flies in oysters at Christmas time.