

**Sociological Forensics: Illuminating the Whole from the Particular**

**Word Length: 7,776 (including title, abstract and bibliography)**

**Keywords: Globalisation, Culture, methodology, case studies, microsociology.**

**Final Submission**

**September 2009**

## **Sociological Forensics: Illuminating the Whole from the Particular**

### **Abstract**

A central task in sociology is to make links between the micro world of events in everyday life and wider social structures and long-term processes of change. This is particularly evident in studying the impact of globalisation on local cultural life. I argue that case studies are a good method for making connections between the micro and the macro. I use an example of a study of globalisation I conducted in a village in Ireland. However, I also argue that within each case study there will be clues, episodes or events which, when analysed with the appropriate theories and concepts, will illuminate the micro and macro connections. This is what I mean by sociological forensics. I justify this approach by grounding it in sociological theory and pointing out how versions of it have been used in some classical case studies.

## Sociological Forensics: Illuminating the Global from the Particular

It was August, 2002. It was lashing rain. It was lunchtime. I called into a local pub in Ballivor, a small village in County Meath. I was researching globalisation. I was interested in all those questions which have intrigued sociologists and anthropologists for sometime: what is the connection between the local and the global (Robertson 1992, 1995; Holton 2005; Hannerz 1996, Van der Bly 2007)? Specifically, I was interested in how Irish culture had become globalised, to what extent everyday life in Ireland had become like the rest of the West or, to what extent there was still something unique and different about the Irish. I had chosen Ballivor as a case study because NEC, the transnational Japanese electronics company, had been in Ballivor for twenty-eight years and, at its height had employed over 500 people. The population of Ballivor was less than four hundred. I went to Ballivor looking for evidence and clues about the impact of such a large Japanese company on local culture, everyday life, identity and sense of self. I had been in the village numerous times, interviewed locals, and workers in the factory, but there was not any sign of a Japanese influence in the village. Ballivor looked like any other village in the East of Ireland. Theories of glocalisation suggested that I should be looking for clues about how the global and the local come together. But there was no sushi for sale in the pub. I had never seen a Japanese person in the village; it turned out most of them lived in Trim, the nearby town. So what signs were there of a glocalised culture? I decided that I was looking in the wrong direction, that I needed to open my eyes and look for other clues. I witnessed the following:

There were a handful of customers. They were being looked after by Tina, a confident young woman. Two of the customers seemed to be an English couple who had come back on holiday. There were local men stretched out along the small bar. At the end of the bar, above the customers, the television was on and switched to the MTV channel. A woman who looked very like Madonna was offering her body to the viewer as she spurned the attractions of dozens of vibrant young men.

Two of the men at the bar were deep in conversation about the forthcoming GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) All Ireland semi-final between counties Mayo and Fermanagh. Meath had one of the best records in the All Ireland championships in the past 30 years, although it had not done so well in recent years. ...

As the two men were talking about the forthcoming GAA match, the two men beside them were talking to each other, and trying to engage the visiting English couple into conversation. One of the men referred to the

dreadful weather and the flooding that had taken place in England the previous day. There had been dramatic pictures on television showing cars and trees being swept down the main street of a village in Cornwall. The English couple responded by referring to the hurricane that had hit Florida over the weekend. One of the local men said that he had heard that there was a possibility of New York being completely flooded. The Englishman said that this would be caused by a volcano occurring on one of the Canary Islands that would cause a big wave to build up across the Atlantic that would eventually crash onto the east coast of America. At the bar, one of the local men replied: "Oh sure, the way the world is going with wars and killing." His counter colleague continued: "It's terrible what is going on in Iraq." . . .

[T]here was a silence before one of the local men said: "Father Kenny died yesterday. He must have been nearly a hundred." The other man said: "A nice decent man." His friend replied: "He was a very nice man, that has to be said." It had been some years since Father Kenny had been in the parish having being promoted to Trim where he retired, eventually spending his days in a nursing home in Mullingar. . . .

The conversation took a turn towards Madonna. The Englishwoman asked, in a teasing manner, if the local men were going to her concert to be held in nearby Slane Castle at the end of the month. One man said no but that he believed the tickets were 100 euro each. The barmaid corrected him: "They're 88 euro." He said that the concert was being held on Sunday rather than Saturday. The barmaid told him that Saturday is Madonna's holy day (Inglis 2008: 231–3).

I had been in the village, in its pubs, in people's homes, and in the NEC factory many times. But as the scene unfolded I began to realise that it was a vital clue in the way glocalisation takes place. Methodologically, I was engaging in a form of non-participant covert research.<sup>1</sup> As I sat at the far end of the bar, but still well in earshot, I pretended to be writing something, not looking too often in their direction. I was, however, taking notes. I am reasonably confident that the participants did not know who I was or what I was doing.

As the scene unfolded over the next ten to fifteen minutes, I realised that it was illuminating the way cosmopolitan outsiders and established locals interacted. But the scene also revealed how global flows of culture (Appadurai 1996) become embedded in local habitus and practice. It was not until I got back home and read through my notes and analysed the clue that I began to interpret it outside the concepts of hybridisation or creolisation and more within a theory of a competitive struggle for honour and respect, or symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986), which was partly accumulated through knowledge and information about the local and the global. I began to interpret them as forms of local and global cultural capital.

In rural Ireland, especially among men and especially in pubs, being able to talk about *gaelic* football and hurling, being able to make good comments about matches and players, is part and parcel of making conversation, of being accepted and respected. Being accepted and respected is also related to being educated, knowledgeable and informed, to knowing what is happening in the world whether it is local or global. This cultural capital can come from being well read, having some specialized knowledge, or simply being informed about what is going on in the world through the media or contact with people.

In trying to describe and analyse glocalisation, I was trying to link the micro world of the meaningful, emotional actions of individuals in everyday life with the macro world of social structures, discourses and long-term historical processes (Alexander *et al.* 1987; Collins 1981a). The micro and the macro may be two sides of the same coin, but the problem is how to investigate social life and develop and write sociology in a way that connects everyday events to an analysis of structures. I argue that, as in DNA where a small fragment of tissue can reveal the nature of the whole person, so too in sociology a microscopic analysis of a fragment of social life can reveal the nature of the social whole to which it belongs. In this case, the ritual interaction in the pub revealed the way the global interacts with the local.

The method of sociological forensics is founded on the theory that the structure of social action reflects in some way the structure of the society and culture of which it is a part. The task of the forensic sociologist is, when examining a particular case, to look for clues which when analysed with appropriate theories and concepts, help reveal the structure of the case. In this respect, sociological forensics is founded on the assumption that there is no distinction between the micro and the macro as they are linked intrinsically. Sociological forensics then tries to avoid, at one extreme, abstract general theorisation, in this case about globalisation and, at the other, concentration on empirical statements. It revolves more around the application of middle-range theory and concepts (Merton 1967) in particular case studies.

The case-study approach has had a lengthy if somewhat chequered career in sociology (Mitchell 1983; Platt 1988, 1992; Ragin and Becker 1992). A case study is a multifaceted investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, using multiple sources of evidence and, generally, qualitative research methods (Feagin *et al.* 1991; Yin 2002). The theoretical and methodological assumptions are that an in-depth analysis of a fragment of a particular case – a document,

conversation, social encounter, pattern of behaviour – can help illuminate the nature of social behaviour in the case and the wider social whole to which it belongs (Gluckman 1961: 9; Becker 1992: 213; Wieviorka 1992: 161–2). The ability to generalise from the particular to the whole is not statistical. It is based on logical inference (Mitchell 1983: 200). The notion of logical inference has theoretical and methodological implications. I argue that once the case study is chosen, instead of trying to capture and describe the whole phenomenon, it is better to look for certain pieces of evidence, clues, which when properly analysed can illuminate the whole (Ginzberg 1989; Scheff 1997).

Sociological forensics, then, avoids two theoretical extremes in analysing case studies. At one extreme, there is the grounded theory approach of not using any existing theories or concepts for fear that they may distort or contaminate the possibility of producing a valid and reliable map of the case (Glaser and Strauss 1967). But if I had not been looking for clues about glocalisation, I might have not seen the vital clues that emerged in the above scene. At the other extreme, I might have overlooked this clue if I was intent on explaining everything in social life in terms of some abstract general theory – Parsonian, Marxian, Foucauldian, Eliasian or Bourdieusian – or in terms of a particular sociological focus – for example gender, class, or religion . In the incident in Ballivor, it may have been insufficient to have applied a general theory of globalisation which, for example, argued that global culture (in the forms of media messages, MTV and Madonna) is nothing more than cultural imperialism and the symbolic domination of local cultural life. This, for example, is the failure of Bourdieu and Waquant (1999) who, in conflating globalisation with American imperialism, do not study empirically the way the global and the local interact and failed to apply a range of middle-range theories and concepts, including Bourdieu's own notions of social field, habitus and the struggle to attain different forms of capital.

Following Ginzberg (1989), I argue that having chosen a particular case, the social investigator should begin by looking for clues, pieces of evidence, that will help illuminate and explain why things happen the way they do; why people behave in a certain way. The task is to look for patterns of behaviour – ways of talking, forms of conversations, regular events and pieces of interaction – which attract attention because they illuminate a wider social whole; in this case the way the global and the local interact. Clues stand out because of their difference. The two men in front of

their pints both underneath and looking up at Madonna was the initial key clue. If I had not been a sociologist, if I had not been sensitised by the concept of glocalisation, I might not have seen the intricate weave of the local with the global. However, as in forensic science, the sociologist needs to employ appropriate tests – in this case appropriate theories and concepts – to help analyse the particular piece of evidence and, therefore, help illuminate the wider social whole. This is why I began to analyse the clues as a division between cosmopolitans and locals, but then reinterpreted them using concepts of local and cosmopolitan cultural capital. It is this combination of pieces of evidence and theories that helps generate what Burawoy (1998) describes as ‘genetic’ explanations. The pieces of evidence illuminated by the theories enable generalisations to be made about the particular case. These generalisations help reconstruct existing theories and show how what happens at the micro level mirrors wider social processes (Carr, 2003).

### **The Case Study**

The case study had a high status during the heydays of early American sociology (Platt 1992). However, it suffered downward mobility with the growing dominance of hard-nosed empiricism, quantitative methods and mathematical modelling (Sjoberg *et al.* 1991: 44–7). There was always the lingering doubt about how representative a single case could be, and the extent to which its findings could be replicated (Orum, Feagin and Sjoberg 1991:17–23). It also suffered from the gradual differentiation between sociology and anthropology during the last century. Rich, thick descriptions were seen as suitable for describing what was unique and strange, but not really appropriate for developing a generalised, scientific knowledge and understanding of contemporary Western society (Burawoy 2003: 649). And yet, case studies have been at the forefront of the development of sociological theory and methodology (Weber 1974; Thomas and Znaniecki 1927; Hunter 1953, Blau 1955; Dahl 1961; Goffman 1961). Indeed Stinchcombe (1978:21–2) argues that good theory emerges when ‘a causal interpretation of a particular case’ becomes the basis of ‘deeper analogies between cases’. Nevertheless, case studies have a marginal status in sociology. They have been cast in the realm of the type of soft social science that has been characterised by cultural studies – neither theoretically sophisticated nor empirically

representative. They have developed the status of an aged aunt; quaint and perhaps fascinating, but representative of little more than individual eccentricity.

One of the reasons why the case study has been marginalised is because it has been theoretically misconceived. Walton (1992: 126) argues that the description and analysis of the causal principles of a particular case enables analogies and comparisons to be made with other cases which, in turn, enables theoretical generalisation. The analysis of each case study is always trying to answer the simple question: 'What is this a case of?' (Walton 1992: 135). A simple question, but difficult to answer because each case study itself contains a myriad of interlinking social phenomena or sub-cases. The task of the researcher is to examine these and look for pieces of evidence – social gatherings, pieces of conversation, attitudes expressed, ongoing practices, shared rituals and, in general, ways of being in and interpreting the world which, because they are an exaggeration of what is ordinary, help reveal the structure of the case. Once particular clues or pieces of evidence are identified, then the researcher looks to different social theories and concepts which help illuminate the causal patterns of the case study and, at a higher level, the wider social whole. The key to this approach is not to squeeze the analysis through the confines of some abstract general theory which tries to provide a universal explanation of social behaviour, but rather to be aware of the wide range of theories and concepts available within sociology that can help analyse the clues and pieces of evidence. Many of these correspond to what Merton referred to as middle-range theories (1967: 39–73). Indeed, as Merton (1967: 51) argued it is the reformulation of a particular theory as a result of a particular analysis that leads it to become middle range. What characterises middle-range theories is that they are empirically grounded, often in case studies (1967:61). Middle-range theories 'consist of limited sets of assumptions from which specific hypotheses are logically derived and confirmed by empirical evidence' (1967:68). It is this notion of theories helping to formulate hypotheses concerning the causal patterns in case studies, which are then confirmed or rejected through a microscopic analysis of particular clues or pieces of evidence, which is at the centre of sociological forensics. Sociological forensics are, then, aligned with Blumer's approach of using sensitising concepts that do not contaminate the particularity of the phenomenon, and Glaser and Strauss's approach of ensuring that any theoretical formulation is continually reshaped after successive stages of fieldwork. However, it differs in that existing theories and concepts are seen not as

potential contaminants, but more as a robust range of tools which are available to the sociologist to analyse vital clues (Blumer 1969; Glaser and Strauss 1967).

### **The whole is contained in the part**

It was, of course, Emile Durkheim in his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* who first placed the notion of sociological forensics on the agenda of sociology. He argued that by studying the simplest and most primitive forms of religious life, one could understand the nature and structure of all religion (1976:415). Durkheim's approach was developed by other structuralist anthropologists, most notably Lévi-Strauss who recommended reducing wholes to miniatures and dissolving them into their constituent parts (1974:23). One of the central elements of a structuralist explanation is, then, that any part of culture, like any sentence, can be understood in terms of the way elements of the whole have been brought together in a certain way (Saussure 1974).

The problem with French structuralism is that the emphasis has always tended to be on the whole, that is the structure, rather than the part. It is language that structures speech; it is discourse that frames thought, class that frames action, and so forth. Any empirical analysis tends therefore to begin with the structure. It is knowledge of the structure that will reveal the nature of the part. There is little or nothing to be gained from a microscopic analysis of the part.

### **Linking the Micro and Macro in Sociology**

Forensic analysis of a case study is itself part of the ongoing struggle in sociology to make linkages between the micro world of the individual and everyday life, and the macro world of structures, discourses, fields and institutions (Alexander *et al.*, 1987; Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel, 1981; Ritzer, 1990). Münch and Smelser (1987:357) see the micro level as involving 'encounters and patterned interaction among individuals', while the macro level refers to 'those structures in society (groups, organizations, institutions and cultural production)' that, through mechanisms of social control, 'constitute both opportunities and constraints on individual behaviour and interactions.' The micro is the pattern of relations between individuals – like words being combined in a sentence – rather than the individual word itself. However, while

the emphasis on patterned interactions among individuals is important – the sense of the micro being relational – an analysis of the individual as an emotionally, embodied self can provide clues about the structure of the social life in which they are enmeshed (see Shilling 1999; Scheff 1990; 1997). However, the way in which a society becomes structured is quite different from the genetic make-up of an individual. Unlike in biological DNA, it is not possible to read the structure of the wider society through some form of sociological DNA of the individual. A diachronic analysis is necessary to make connections between the individual and the wider social whole. In a case study, we need to know how individuals and social life came to be the way they are and not otherwise. This necessitates a more long-term historical analysis to determine how the emotionally embodied self came to be constituted as it is, how the relations between the self and the family, group and community became constituted, and how both developed in relation to the wider social whole.

Sociological forensics fits in with Collins' notion of radical microsociology. He argues that since culture, the economy, states, organisations and classes do not act, any causal explanation in sociology has to start with the empirical world and the real live actions of individuals (1987:195). The problem with concentrating on macro issues is that it leads to too much abstract generalisation, to squeezing phenomena into some universal exploratory model and, therefore, to a distorted view of empirical reality. (Collins, 1981b:83–8). Radical microsociology requires the translation of all macro phenomena into combinations of micro-events. This, Collins argues, is best achieved through concentrating on the way people engage in conversation and develop emotional relationships that lead into chains of ritual interactions (1981a: 999–1002). One key dimension of Collins' approach is the rooting of the explanation for social behaviour in feelings of solidarity rather than in interests and norms. These feelings of solidarity are crucial to building reputations, developing alliances, and building organisations. The first problem is to show how these feelings – and changes in these feelings – lead to changes in 'analytically real' structures such as states, discourses and classes. And, *vice versa*, the problem is to show how 'real' structures impinge on individuals outside the time and space of chains of ritual interactions (see Gisen, 1987; Alexander, 1987; and Münch, 1987). The task is to combine an understanding of the emotions, choices and interactions of individuals with an understanding of the social and cultural organisations and structures through which they have been constituted and, consequently, realise themselves as individuals.

The strategy of analysing a micro phenomenon to illuminate the social structure of a case is common in anthropology. Evans-Pritchard argued that most of the Nuer's social activities concern cattle, and '*cherchez la vache* is the best advice that can be given to those who desire to understand Nuer behaviour (1940:16). Geertz maintained that 'at the center of the whole Javanese religious system lies a simple, formal, undramatic, almost furtive ritual; the *slametan*' (1960:11). Douglas saw funerary ritual as one blueprint, among others that, when analysed, revealed the social structure of a Spanish Basque Village (1969:218).

### **Sociological Forensics**

The practice of reading clues and making diagnoses about the larger picture (or social whole), dates back to hunter-gatherer societies when hunters learnt to read vital signs of what kind of animals had passed through an area, from which direction and how long ago, from tracks, broken branches, excrement, tufts of hair, and so forth (Ginzberg, 1989:102). These conjectural methods became part and parcel of disciplines as far-ranging and distinct as medicine, criminology and psycho-analysis. The task of the doctor is to examine a patient all the time reading symptoms as clues of particular illnesses and diseases. This is why trainee doctors learn to take detailed case histories, consciously being on the lookout for vital clues that may reveal why a patient has become ill. Criminologists look for stains, pieces of textile, hair and skin, footprints, fingerprints, tyre marks, to build a picture of what took place and who was present at a crime scene. The psychoanalyst looks for repetitive behavioural patterns, nervous reactions, and body dispositions as symptoms of underlying emotional disturbances. The smallest gesture can often reveal more about a person's character than any formal posture.

The approach in all of these disciplines is highly qualitative. As Ginzberg points out, 'the object is the study of individual cases, situations, and documents, precisely *because they are individual*, and for this reason get results that have an unsuppressible (sic) speculative margin... .' (1989: 106, emphasis in original). It is important to remember that in a similar vein, sociologists when trying to explain social life should look for phenomena that stand out at the level of social action; who meets and does what with whom, when and where; the way people greet and relate to each other, what they talk about, how they identify and describe themselves, and the

references they make to others. Given the principle that elements of the whole can always be found in the part, when these clues are carefully analysed, they can provide an insight into the wider social structure. What is important to emphasise is that the more often a sociologist uses a forensic approach, the more proficient he or she will become, not only in selecting a good case study, but finding clues that might be imperceptible or seem irrelevant to most people.

### **Looking for Clues**

The search for clues in sociological forensics is as painstaking as it is in any criminal investigation. The task is to explain how social life in the case study operates; how things have come to be the way they are. This involves two simultaneous processes. The first is standing back and attempting to gain a distant or detached view of the case, remembering that familiarity breeds oversight of vital clues. When I went into the pub in Ballivor, I was seeking nothing more than food and shelter. An over-involvement in meeting these needs might have prevented me from recognising the clues that emerged before me. Secondly, there is a need for some sensitising theory or concept. I was looking at the interaction in terms of glocalisation and looking for evidence of creolisation and hybridisation. I was particularly interested in Appadurai's (1996: 32–6) concept of different types of global cultural flows, and Hannerz's (1996: 102–11) distinction between cosmopolitans and locals. But I was flexible and adaptable with the use of theory. If I had been interested in gender relations I would have read the scene very differently. My reading of previous studies of glocalisation had sensitised me about what to look out for. The more I read and researched, the better I would become at recognising vital clues.

The challenge of sociological forensics is, then, to be open to a variety of research strategies and sociological theories. In the same way that middle-range theories and concepts can be seen as a tool-kit to analyse and explain phenomena encountered during research, the researcher should also look upon research methods as different ways of looking for clues (Swidler 1986: 2001: 103–6). In addition to the covert observation, I completed a number of semi-structured, in-depth, qualitative interviews with employees and former employees of NEC. However, I began to realise from these interviews that I was not capturing the demands of working twelve hour shifts had on the personal lives of the workers. So I switched to focus group

interviews. Hearing fellow workers talk about the impact shift work had on them, helped others to talk about their own experiences.

Another example of being open to using different research methods was my interest in capturing how globalisation was impacting on the everyday lives of young people. I decided to approach the local primary school. Having decided from previous research that personal or focus group interviews would be unproductive as well as disruptive for the pupils and teachers, I decided to get the final year pupils to write short essays on the topic 'My World' and, when they had completed this, to complete a short two-page questionnaire that focused on their everyday life and their tastes, hobbies and pleasures.

In reading and analysing the essays and questionnaires of the school-children, I realised that there was not a division between locals and cosmopolitans (some of the pupils were outsiders from Dublin), but rather a struggle to attain social position through accumulating different forms of cultural capital, some of which were more local and others that came from outside. I began to realise that while some of the villagers attained social position through forms of cultural capital that came through global flows, others were more embedded in village life and had accumulated, and were more dependent on, local cultural capital. So I began to adapt Bourdieu's (1986) concept of different forms of capital and to think of villagers accumulating both local and global forms of cultural capital. I began to look for clues which would reveal how some villagers, particularly the established, emphasised the value of local cultural capital, that is being knowledgeable about local history, people and places, while others emphasised travel and knowledge and appreciation of the outside world.

A forensic approach also requires a willingness to revise theories and concepts. I had originally hypothesised that the arrival of a transnational corporation would be the primary influence in changing the culture of the village. However, in observing the large growth in housing estates around the village – the population of Ballivor in quadrupled in ten years from 383 in 1996 to 1,212 in 2006 (Census of Population 2006 II: table 7) – and then listening to the many references to commuting made during the interviews, I began to realise that the globalisation on the village was more related to the development of Dublin as a global city. What impacted most on the life of established villagers was not just that they were now outnumbered by outsiders, but that they were rapidly becoming unknown, disregarded and, many felt, not respected. I began to think of the villagers being divided not so much in terms of

local and cosmopolitans, but in terms of Elias and Scotson's (1994) distinction between the 'established' and the 'outsiders'. Moreover, when I went back over the interviews, I realised that this division was maintained through the practice of some of the established villagers talking down the outsiders – what Elias and Scotson (1994: 89–105) term 'blame gossip' and talking up the established villagers ('praise gossip'). Again, it is an eclectic use of middle-range theories and concepts which helped illuminate what was happening.

Sociological forensics is, then, a particular method of doing case study research. It is not ethnography. I did not feel the need to live in Ballivor. I have lived nearly all of my life in Ireland. It was more a process of going back and forward to the village, trying out different methods to uncover clues, and applying different theories and concepts to make sense of them. However, it is necessary to place the particular 'case' within the broader social and cultural context in which it is found and, equally important, to place it within a long-term historical context. Ballivor was a case study of transformations that had taken place across Ireland during the rapid economic growth of the Celtic Tiger. It was important then, to reveal how it could be the way it was and how it was similar to, but also different from, other villages in Ireland.

For sociological forensics to be used successfully, it is important to be able to see clues that reveal the connection between macro level processes and structures and the micro level of action, meaning and emotion. While I examined various forms of expressed identity and patterns of social interaction, I might in hindsight have undertaken more analysis of bodies, gestures, displays of emotions, and accents. The way many of the villagers presented themselves, their bodies, gestures and language, particularly the young people, were derived as much from flows of American media as from having been brought up in Catholic Ireland.

### **Classical Case Studies**

There are, I believe, plenty of clues of a forensic approach in some classical studies in sociology. In Elias and Scotson's *The Established and the Outsiders* (1994) the researchers realised how gossip was the vital clue which helped illuminate the divide between the groups. Through 'blame' gossip the established attached the worst traits of a minority of the outsiders to whole group. In their everyday interaction, members of the established configuration stigmatised the outsiders as people of lower human

value – as people of ‘low morals’, ‘boozers’, who were uncouth, unruly, noisy, violent and unable to control their children (Elias 1994: xxi; Elias and Scotson 1994: 101). On the other hand, the established, through ‘praise’ gossip, consistently attributed the best traits of a small minority of their own configuration to the configuration as a whole (Elias and Scotson 1994: 92; 104). They began to see the way gossip fulfilled an integrative function, the way the Estate people did not have the power to disagree with the Village people’s depiction of them (particularly in terms of controlling their children), and the way gossip was central to group image, charisma and identity. However, Elias and Scotson made hardly any references to macro structures and, in particular, to long-term historical processes. Indeed, as Mennell (1992: 119) points out, not only were the links of gossip to power imbalances not developed fully, but the links between gossip, high and low status groups and the arguments of Elias’s *The Civilising Process* were ‘sketched in very lightly’. In other words, the opportunity was missed of showing how the microscopic analysis of gossip in everyday life was linked to maintaining power which, in turn, was linked to being civilised.

Whyte’s *Street Corner Society* provides another example of how vital small clues can be important in illuminating social structure. Whyte studied a gang of corner boys in an Eastern city in the United States at the end of the 1930s. He wanted to show how the micro world of the boys was linked into the macro world of racketeering and politics: how the big shots dominated and controlled the little guys in the gangs but, also, how they were dependent on them (1969: xx). At the end of the 1938 season, a bowling game was organised and, when it was over, Whyte realised that the final rankings of gang members in the game closely matched their status position in the gang. Whyte then went back over previous results and found that this held true for all games. From this initial clue, he went on to discover that status in the gang was closely related not just to performance as a corner-boy, to where one sat in the cafeteria, to how one performed in sports particularly bowling competitions but, also, to a gang member’s mental health (1969:15–25; 256; 328).

What made Willis’s *Learning to Labour* a classic was the way in which his in-depth analysis of one school illuminated not just how some boys cultivated themselves as future factory workers, but the mechanism by which class reproduction takes place through education. He showed how the ‘lads’ opted out of the school system and developed a counter-culture based around truancy, skipping class, messing, drinking and, generally, ‘having a laff’. He described the informal honour

system and the importance of masculinity and being able to fight. He made a connection between the way the 'lads' sought to attain status and respect in the school, and the way workers looked for status and respect on the factory floor. Both were achieved through a practical attitude to life, to engaging in practical jokes, 'pistakes', 'kiddings' and 'windups'. However, unlike Whyte, who observed what happened during bowling and used this as a clue to illuminate the way the gang hierarchy operated, Willis does not seem to have deliberately looked for clues in the everyday life of the school or factory that might have revealed how the struggle for status and respect operated. Instead he seems to have relied on analysing the interviews he conducted.

## **Conclusion**

Sociological forensics is itself a sensitising concept that encourages researchers engaged in case study research to look for clues that link the micro phenomena of everyday social life to social structures, institutions and long-term historical processes. The methodology follows the logic of case studies. In the same way that the study of a single case can reveal the nature of a social whole, so too can the detailed analysis of pieces of evidence within the particular case reveal the logic and structure of the wider social life of which they are part. The clues revealed in the pub episode described above emerged from the notion of glocalisation as being a way of understanding globalisation. But, as well as revealing how glocalisation was taking place in Ballivor, the episode also helps illuminate the process of glocalisation generally.

The general theoretical presupposition behind this methodology is that the content and structure of any part of social life contains elements of the social whole to which it belongs. A microscopic analysis of social parts can, then, illuminate the structure and process of the social whole to which they belong. At the level of epistemology, sociological forensics operates by going back and forward between clues and theories. The task is to make reliable and verifiable statements about any clues discovered and to explain these through a variety of middle-range theories and concepts.

Sociological forensics is a conjectural or speculative science. It builds up a picture of a social whole through a careful search and analysis of signs that are seen as

symptomatic of social life. It is based on building a complex reality – society, social structures, long-term historical processes – from empirical data that are apparently insignificant. It revolves around looking for clues from everyday social life that might easily be passed over. These seemingly superficial items of social behaviour are noticed by the forensic sociologist because of a detached perspective, a practical, empirical and theoretical expertise, and a knowledge and understanding of social actors and social life.

Sociological forensics provides a systematic way for describing and analysing case studies. The research moves up and down between different levels, the specific clue, the case study, and the larger whole to which the case study belongs. It is existing knowledge of the social whole that informs the analysis of the case and, at the same time, it is knowledge of the case that informs the analysis of the clue. However, the analysis of the structure and processes of the clues can reorient and reform knowledge and understanding of the case and the wider social whole.

This methodology can be used even when there is a big gap between the part and the wider social whole, as is the case in globalisation. Instead, for example of trying to capture how culture has become globalised, how people are increasingly becoming similar to each other, it is productive to analyse one episode, in a small village in one country and to examine the extent to which social behaviour and everyday life around the world is becoming similar or different. The task, then, would be to look for clues which reveal the nature, structure and processes of these similarities and differences.

## Notes

1. This study was undertaken in the days before research in my university came under the strict supervision of the Research Ethics Committee. If, as I suspect might now be the case, I would have had to ask the participants for their permission to take part, this intrusion would have undoubtedly interfered with the social interaction. This is not to deny that people in their everyday life have a right to be protected against research that is contrary to their interests. For me, it is a question of balancing the need to try to tell the truth about social life and the need to protect the rights of individuals.

## Bibliography

- Alexander, J., B. Giesen, R. Münch, and N. Smelser (1987) *The Micro-Macro Link*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Alexander, J. (1987) 'Action and its Environments' in J. Alexander, B. Giesen, R. Münch and N. Smelser (eds) *The Micro-Macro Link*, pp. 298–318. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Becker, H. (1992) 'Cases, causes, conjunctures, stories, and imagery' in C. Ragin and H. Becker (eds) *What is a Case?: Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*, pp. 205–16. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blau, P. (1955) *The Dynamics of Bureaucracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Blumer, H. (1969) *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Englewood Cliffs [NJ]: Prentice-Hall.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The Forms of Capital' in J. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, pp. 241–58. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, P. and L. Wacquant (1999) 'On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason' *Theory, Culture & Society*. 16 (1): 41–58.
- Burawoy, M. (1998) 'The Extended Case Method' *Sociological Theory* 16(1): 4–33.
- Burawoy, M. (2003) 'Revisits: An Outline of a Theory of Reflexive Ethnography', *American Sociological Review* 68: 645–79.
- Carr, P. (2003) 'The New Parochialism: The Implications of the Beltway Case of Arguments Concerning Informal Social Control' *American Journal of Sociology* 108 (6): 1249–91.
- Census of Population 2006 Volume 2 Areas. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.
- Collins, R. (1981a) 'On the Microfoundations of Macrosociology', *American Journal of Sociology*, 86(5): 984–1014.
- Collins, R. (1981b) 'Micro-translation as a theory-building strategy' in K. Knorr-Cetina and A.V. Cicourel (eds.) *Advances in social theory and methodology: Toward an integration of micro- and macro-sociologies*, pp. 81–108. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Collins, R. (1987) 'Interaction Ritual Chains, Power and Property' in J. Alexander, B. Giesen, R. Münch and N. Smelser (eds) *The Micro-Macro Link*, pp. 183–206. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Dahl, R. (1961) *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Douglas, W. (1969) *Death in Murelaga: Funerary Ritual in a Spanish Basque Village*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Durkheim, E. (1976[1915]) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Elias, N. (1994 [1976]) 'Introduction' in N. Elias and J. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems*, pp. xv–lii. London: Sage.
- Elias, N. and J. Scotson (1994) *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems*. London: Sage.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. (1940) *The Nuer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Feagin, J., A. Orum and G. Sjoberg (1991) *A Case for the Case Study*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Geertz, C. (1960) *The Religion of Java*. Glencoe [IL.]: The Free Press
- Giesen, B. (1987) 'Beyond Reductionism: Four models Relating Micro and Macro Levels', in J. Alexander, B. Giesen, R. Münch and N. Smelser (eds) *The Micro-Macro Link*, pp. 337–55. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ginzberg, C. (1989) *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Glaser, B. and A. Strauss (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies of Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine.
- Gluckman, M. (1961) 'Ethnographic Data in British social anthropology', *The Sociological Review* 9 (1): 5–17.
- Goffman, E. (1961) *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. Garden City [New York]: Anchor Books
- Hannerz, U. (1996) *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*. London: Routledge.
- Holton, Robert (2005) *Making Globalization*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hunter, F. (1953) *Community Power Structure*. Chapel Hill [NC]: University of North Carolina Press.
- Inglis, Tom (2008) *Global Ireland: Same Difference*. New York: Routledge.

- Knorr-Cetina, K. and A. Cicourel (eds) (1981) *Advances in social theory and methodology: Toward an integration of micro- and macro-sociologies*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mennell, S. (1992) *Norbert Elias: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Merton, R. (1967) *On Theoretical Sociology*. New York: The Free Press.
- Mitchell, J. C. (1983) 'Case and Situation Analysis' *The Sociological Review* 31(2): 187–211.
- Münch, R. (1987) 'The Interpenetration of Microinteraction and Macrostructures in a Complex and Contingent Institutional Order', in J. Alexander, B. Giesen, R. Münch and N. Smelser (eds) *The Micro-Macro Link*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Münch, R. and Smelser, N. (1987) 'Relating the Micro and the Macro', in J. Alexander, B. Giesen, R. Münch and N. Smelser (eds.) *The Micro-Macro Link*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Orum, A., J. Feagin, and G. Sjoberg (1991) 'Introduction: The Nature of the Case Study' in J. Feagin, A. Orum and G. Sjoberg (eds) *A Case for the Case Study*, pp. 1–26. Chapel Hill [NC]: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Platt, J. (1988) 'What can case studies do?' in R. Burgess (ed.) *Studies in Qualitative Methodology: Conducting Qualitative Research*, pp. 160–79. Greenwood [CT]: JAI Press.
- Platt, J. (1992) "'Case Study" in American methodological thought: The Case Method in Sociology', *Current Sociology*. 40(1): 17–48.
- Ragin, C. and Becker, H. (eds) (1992) *What is a Case?: Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ritzer, G. (1990) 'Micro-Macro Linkage in Sociological Theory: Applying a Metatheoretical Tool', in G. Ritzer (ed.) *Frontiers of Social Theory: The New Syntheses*, pp. 347–70. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Robertson, Roland (1992) *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: Sage.
- Robertson, R. (1995) 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity–Heterogeneity' in M. Featherstone, S. Lash and R. Robertson (eds) *Global Modernities*, pp. 25–44. London: Sage.
- Saussure, de, F. (1974) *Course in General Linguistics*. London: Fontana
- Scheff, T. (1990) *Microsociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Scheff, T. (1997) *Emotions, the social bond, and human reality: part/whole analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shilling, C. (1999) 'Toward an embodied understanding of the structure/agency debate' *British Journal of Sociology*, 50(4): 543–562.

Sjoberg, G., N. Williams, T. Vaughan, T. and A. Sjoberg (1991) 'The Case Study Approach in Social Research' J. Feagin, A. Orum and G. Sjoberg (eds) *A Case for the Case Study*, pp. 27–79. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Stinchcombe, A. (1978) *Theoretical Methods in Social History*. New York: Academic Press.

Swidler, A. (1986) 'Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies' *American Sociological Review* 51: 273—86.

Swidler, Ann (2001) *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Thomas, W. I. and F. Znaniecki (1927) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, 2 vols, New York: Knopf.

Van der Bly, M. (2007) 'The Rise of One Heterogeneous World Culture – A Micro-Perspective of a Global Village' *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 48 (2–3): 234–56

Walton, J. (1992) 'Making the Theoretical Case' in C. Ragin and H. Becker (eds) *What is a Case?: Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*, pp 121–37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weber, M. (1974) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Unwin University Books.

Whyte, W. F. (1969) *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wieviorka, M. (1992) 'Case studies: history or sociology?' in C. Ragin and H. Becker (eds) *What is a Case?: Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*, pp. 159–72. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Willis, P. (1980) *Learning to Labour*. Farnborough: Saxon House.

Yin, R. (2002) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. London: Sage.