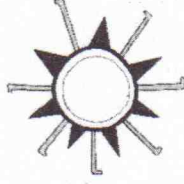


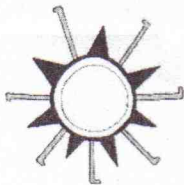
# **Chronicling Cultures Long-Term Field Research in Anthropology**

Edited by Robert V. Kemper  
and Anya Peterson Royce



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# CONTENTS



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Preface

Long-Term Field Research: Metaphors, Paradigms, and Themes  
*Anya Peterson Royce and Robert V. Kemper*

## PART I

### RESTUDIES AND REVISITS: STYLES OF COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

**CHAPTER ONE** Learning to See, Learning to Listen: Thirty-Five Years  
 of Fieldwork with the Isthmus Zapotec  
*Anya Peterson Royce*

**CHAPTER TWO** Katutura and Namibia: The People, the Place, and  
 the Fieldwork  
*Wade Pendleton*

**CHAPTER THREE** Mysore Villages Revisited  
*T. Scarlett Epstein*

**CHAPTER FOUR** Collaborative Long-Term Ethnography and  
 Longitudinal Social Analysis of a Nomadic Clan in Southeastern Turkey  
*Ulla C. Johansen and Douglas R. White*

## PART II

### LARGE-SCALE PROJECTS

**CHAPTER FIVE** The Long-Term Study among the Navajo  
*Louise Lamphere*

**CHAPTER SIX** The Harvard Chiapas Project: 1957–2000  
*Evon Z. Vogt*

vii

xiii

I

8

34

59

81

101

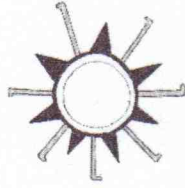
108

135

<b>CHAPTER SEVEN</b>	Local Cultures and Global Systems: The Ju/'hoansi-Kung and Their Ethnographers Fifty Years On Richard B. Lee and Megan Biesele	160
<b>PART III</b>		
<b>PASSING THE MANTLE: MULTIGENERATIONAL PROJECTS</b>		<b>191</b>
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT</b>	Long-Term Research in Gwembe Valley, Zambia Thayer Scudder and Elizabeth Colson	197
<b>CHAPTER NINE</b>	Multigenerations and Multidisciplines: Inheriting Fifty Years of Gwembe Tonga Research Lisa Cliggett	239
<b>CHAPTER TEN</b>	A Half Century of Field Research in Tzintzuntzan, Mexico: A Personal View George M. Foster	252
<b>CHAPTER ELEVEN</b>	From Student to Steward: Tzintzuntzan as Extended Community Robert V. Kemper	284
<b>CHAPTER TWELVE</b>	Being the Third Generation in Tzintzuntzan Peter S. Cahin	313
<b>Index</b>		329
<b>About the Contributors</b>		349

**CHAPTER NINE**  
**MULTIGENERATIONS AND MULTIDISCIPLINES:**  
**INHERITING FIFTY YEARS OF**  
**GWEMBE TONGA RESEARCH**

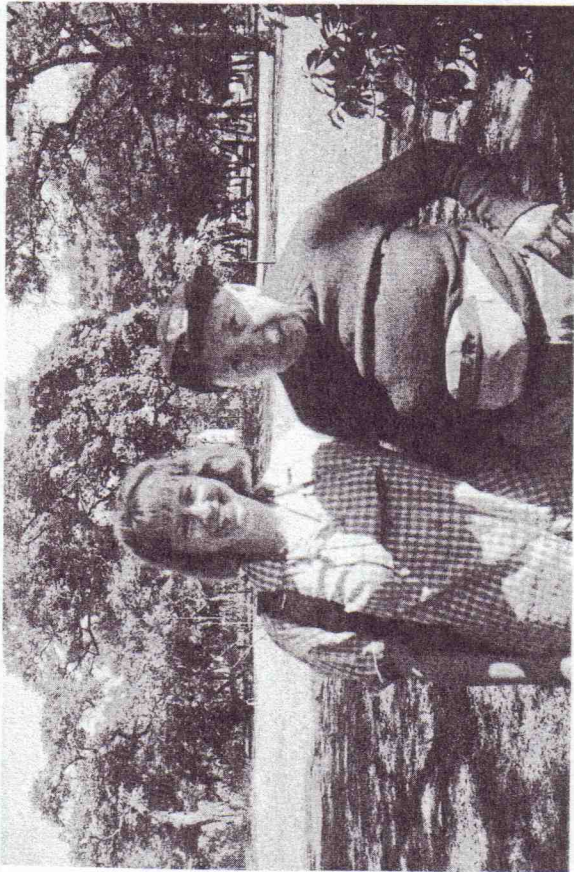
*Lisa Cliggett*



**Introduction**

In March 1994, a month before leaving to begin eighteen months of dissertation research in Zambia, I made a decision to shift my field site from Zambia's Eastern Province to the Gwembe Valley in the Southern Province. Ted Scudder, crawling on his hands and knees around a ten-foot-square lab table covered with detailed maps of the Gwembe Valley, acted as the catalyst in my decision. It remains unclear whether it was Ted's show alone or the combination of his animated persuasion, his description of the Gwembe project history, and the opportunity to "jump-start" my research with forty years of data on the village where I would work that led to my decision. The specific reasons for turning my research gaze to the southern border of Zambia no longer seem important; the outcome of that decision, however, remains one of the most important forces in both my professional and personal life.

That decision of March 1994 was only one of many twists on my long and circuitous path toward establishing a research focus and site for my dissertation, which is not such a new story for many anthropologists. Tales abound in the discipline of doctoral research plans gone awry, and of chance happenings and resulting transformations in focus, region, and scholarship. In my case, the meandering path included initial graduate training focused on Caribbean anthropology, including religion and ethnomusicology, but eventually crystallized around household economy and social organization in Haiti. Political upheavals in 1991, which reached a peak within a month of my return from preliminary research, made it clear that I needed to reframe my research plans to accommodate an alternative research site. At about the same time, one of my graduate advisors became involved in a collaborative research project on aging in Zambia. Since he was a demographer familiar with highly quantitative data, and his Zambian colleague was a sociologist specializing in public health, and they knew my anthropological research interests centered on aging and household economics, they asked if I would consider joining their project as an ethnographer, to provide the ethnographic context and qualitative data that would complement the survey research they were proposing.



Lisa Cliggett and Elizabeth Colson at the Choma Museum, 1998. Photo by Grazyna Zaucha.

After much reflection on the ramifications of “jumping the Haitian ship,” I decided to join their project. Of course, this meant prolonging my graduate training to gain more background on Africa in general and Zambia more specifically, to learn a new language, and to “retool” for an African focus in my dissertation research. Little did I know then that I was training myself for joining one of the oldest and most comprehensive anthropological studies carried out on the African continent.

### How Does One Become the Next Generation?

Two years after turning my research interests farther east and south from Haiti, I found myself funded with my own Fulbright Fellowship, while the survey project remained unfunded and in a holding pattern after two rounds of proposal writing. In my last month of preparing for departure to Zambia, with functional language skills for a region in the Eastern Province, on the Malawian border, I met Ted Scudder. Or rather, he tracked me down as I passed through Bloomington, where I was a graduate student at Indiana University, between a variety of prefieldwork trips. Ted had heard about my plans to do research on household decision-making and support systems for the elderly from Rhonda Gillett-Netting, one of my graduate school colleagues who had linked her own dissertation work to Gwembe data (she is now one of the three members of “the next generation” of the Gwembe Tonga Research Project). When Ted learned about my planned dissertation research, he thought that my theoretical interests and topical focus meshed well with

the Gwembe project and that my own work could benefit from the vast quantity of data he and Elizabeth Colson had collected over the years.

In fact, Rhonda had been trying to convince me to shift my Zambian regional focus to the Southern Province since I had first decided to work in Zambia, partly so that we could collaborate on certain aspects of our research. By telling Ted about my research interests, she gained a solid comrade with unmatched persuasive skills. Although Ted enthusiastically encouraged me to conduct research in the Gwembe, there was no discussion at that time about my becoming any kind of “project member.” I would benefit from shifting my dissertation field site to the Gwembe through access to data, to which Ted and Elizabeth agreed, as well as the ease of “setting up shop” in a location where locals have previously lived with anthropologists. The project would benefit from my presence in the Gwembe in terms of the field notes and data I would share with Elizabeth and Ted, through my help in maintaining contact with communities and individuals during my stay, and simply by having another researcher show interest in the region. At the time, I saw the gains for both me and the project as short term: I could contemplate a timely completion of my dissertation, while the project would have a researcher in the region for a significant period of time.

Now—seven years, four field trips, and two research projects later—I am one of three social researchers comprising the next generation of the Gwembe Tonga Research Project (Cliggett 1997a, 2000). I feel deep gratitude for Ted’s persuasive tendencies, Elizabeth’s patience and insight, and their openness and encouragement. The benefits of joining a long-standing, systematic, and respected research program are immense, but the challenges can be daunting. In reflecting on my experience with long-term fieldwork, I highlight some of the benefits and challenges by considering the future of our project research among the Gwembe Tonga specifically and in anthropology generally.

### Inheriting Relationships: Arriving in the Field as the Next Generation

As any social scientist conducting research among peoples already accustomed to our odd behaviors, activities, and incessant questions will point out, the ease of starting fieldwork in such a setting cannot be taken for granted. In the Gwembe Valley, I lived in the homestead of a man and his family who have been Elizabeth Colson’s hosts since the early 1960s. Kaciente’s familiarity with the anthropologist’s need to spend a few hours every day writing in solitude (and most Americans’ general preference for periods of privacy), without any explanation on my part, greatly facilitated my settling into Sinafala village. As soon as I said, “after eating, I will go to my house to write for a little while,” Kaciente would appoint himself official greeter for any potential visitors and inform them that I could not be disturbed at the moment. Prior to conducting my field research, I never would have thought of the value of such “protection.” Arriving into a system already in

