THE INCORPORATION OF A STRANGER: ANALYSIS OF A SOCIAL SITUATION IN A WELSH VALLEY

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THE study of social situations, pioneered by Max Gluckman in 1940,[1] has been employed by anthropologists to indicate the structural characteristics as well as the cultural values of a particular society. The ethnographer observes and describes a ceremony — such as the opening of a bridge,[2] the performance of a dance,[3] or the burial of a local notable[4] — and then considers, after the description of the local scene, the wider concerns of the particular group or community.

In this paper I propose to describe and analyse the ceremony which I attended in honour of Dr Lionel, a Jewish medical practitioner, who had looked after his patients in a Welsh valley for fifty years, and who had retired. I had been invited as a friend of Dr Lionel; I was not from that valley nor one of his family. Our friendship stemmed from the time I had taught him modern Hebrew during the hours when my children and his grandchildren had attended religion classes on a Sunday morning at the Swansea synagogue of which we are both members.

On 23rd March 1991, a Saturday night, the valley Welfare Committee welcomed 300 guests at the community centre, a converted cinema, which was filled to capacity with members of Dr Lionel's family, patients, and distinguished guests. The latter included the local member of parliament as well as the MP for the adjacent constitutency, and the local mayor. The seats in the front row were occupied by Dr Lionel and his wife, their children, grandchildren, and other relatives; those in the next three rows were reserved in the names of specially-invited guests, and the remaining seats were available to all the rest of the attendance. (Later, it was to become apparent that the seating arrangements had been very carefully planned.)

Several smaller events to honour Dr Lionel had taken place earlier: there had been receptions and presentations at the local rugby club

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which had used his medical services; at the St John Ambulance Brigade where he had acted as Associate Serving Officer; and at a local old people's home. The March ceremony was to be the culmination of all the meetings marking the gratitude of the local community, the final parting of Dr Lionel the local medical practitioner, and his new status as simply another inhabitant of the valley.

There was no precedent for such a ceremony, although retirement presentations are common in offices and factories, of course. The speakers were colleagues of Dr Lionel, politicians, singers, and patients. It was a formal ceremony, but there were elements of relaxed spontaneity and local intimacy. There had been no rehearsals but a local photographer and a video maker recorded the event. (I have altered the names of the principal organizers and of the doctor himself in order to preserve their privacy and at the request of the doctor who took over from Dr Lionel.) Mrs Cooper, who was the Chairman of the Welfare Committee and one of Dr Lionel's patients, chaired the proceedings and acted as a mistress of ceremonies. She stood on the stage and began by welcoming the guests, mentioning the two members of parliament. She said that this was a sad-happy event: they were losing their doctor, but he was to continue living among them after having served the community for 'fifty years, two months, three weeks, and five days'; then the mayor came forward to present a certificate on behalf of the local council and apologized for having to leave since he was obliged to attend another function. Mrs Cooper then introduced the local male voice choir, about fifty mainly middle-aged and elderly men, attired in dark blazers, white shirts, ties, and slacks. Their programme consisted of a medley of eight songs, beginning with a negro spiritual and including the well-known Hebrew song, 'Hava nagilla hava', as well as 'Softly, as I leave you' (considered appropriate for the occasion of a retirement), and ended with 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic' in which the audience joined enthusiastically.

After the choir, a semi-professional entertainer — who was a patient of Dr Lionel — came to the stage'; she began by praising the doctor and noted with pretended sadness that he was gravely handicapped since he still spoke with the broad Scottish accent of his native Glasgow, even after living in the valley for 50 years. She then announced that she was going to give a lecture on the art of Wenglish (Welsh English as spoken in the valley) and cited as a particular example the local use of the word 'tidy' — such as having a 'tidy bit in the bank' and 'it is a tidy step'. As to the latter, she begged her audience not to give directions to 'foreigners' in the valley by saying 'it's a tidy step', but to warn them: 'it's a long way'. Another confusing Wenglish usage for outsiders were statements such as, 'Don't give it to me now, give it to me again' — or even more confusing, 'Don't give it to me now, give it to me next'. She also used the well-known double-entendre about a woman being 'in bed under the

doctor', which was very well received by her audience, whom she urged at the end of her act to be 'kind to foreigners'.

She was followed by Mrs Cooper who recited a poem entitled 'To Lionel', which she had composed in his honour. She told the gathering that she had been both a patient of his and his seamstress and tailoress for many years.

Another item was a tape recording made by Lionel's granddaughter, a young woman of 20 who was a trainee broadcaster for a local radio station. She had recorded an interview with the well-known Welsh comedy actor, Windsor Davies, who had been starring in Cardiff at a Christmas pantomime. He recalled an occasion some years earlier when both he and Lionel had been honoured with awards for local service by the local valley council and joked that it was a pity that he could not attend the retirement ceremony, since he might then have obtained a sick note from the doctor so that he could show cause for evading a Saturday matinée performance in order to attend the Wales-England rugby match. The town's women's choir then came to the platform and sang six songs, including a Jewish lullaby 'Shlaf mein kind' (Sleep, my child) sung in Yiddish and in English. The choir leader said that Lionel himself had taught them the song for a performance at an Eisteddfod 15 years earlier. This brought to an end the first half of the celebrations.

The second half started with the presentation to Lionel's wife, Patricia, of a large bouquet of flowers given by the patients; and then a local Labour councillor, Mrs Bittle, delivered the longest speech of the evening. She reminisced about the past, when there used to be three collieries in the valley (now there were none) and Lionel would go underground to treat the sick and injured miners. General medical services were very limited at that time, before the establishment of the National Health Service, but the miners had run their own medical scheme. They could be seen in the local surgery, which had a dispensary, and the family doctor had a crucial role to play then. Lionel's services were still very greatly valued and she had to confess that when he and Patricia went to Israel for their golden wedding, they selfishly hated him for going on holiday, explaining: 'We never felt safe without you!'. A public collection had raised £1,300; £300 had bought a video recorder and a cheque for £1,000 was presented, enclosed in a tube decorated with white heather and tied with a tartan ribbon — Scottish emblems which touched Lionel (but not Patricia who is English). She stressed that the presentation was given with love and appreciation, concluding 'Well done, our good and faithful servant!'.

Lionel's medical partner, Dr Patel, who is Indian and Catholic, then rose to recount that he had first encountered Lionel in a newsagent's shop in a nearby town; they each had a stethoscope protruding from a pocket, but they had not exchanged a word. A few days later, Dr Patel

had replied to an advertisement for a medical partner and knocked at the door of Dr Lionel who had invited him for an interview. Both men were amazed to recognize each other after their silent meeting at the newsagent's. Lionel accepted him into the practice and he thus became the first Indian doctor in the valley. Dr Patel greatly praised Lionel and Patricia for their kindness to him and to his children: Lionel treated the latter as if they were his own grandchildren and Dr Patel considered Lionel's family to be his own. After a partnership of 16 years, he would now greatly miss someone he had taken for granted.

Lionel concluded the ceremony with an emotional and moving speech, but he began by dropping his notes — which aroused immediate sympathy from his audience. He paid tribute to his wife, 'a modern Florence Nightingale without a lamp but with a portable telephone'. He then spoke of his school-days in Glasgow, where his geography teacher had been the father of Dr Andrews who had recruited Lionel in 1940, when all he knew about Wales was that it had four large cities and produced a great deal of coal. But in the course of time, his two daughters had been born in Cardiff and two granddaughters in Swansea. At that point, he again dropped his notes. He picked them up and recollected that he had first come to the valley in December 1940 while there was torrential rain — but then a triple rainbow appeared and he considered that to be a good omen, although he never did find a crock of gold at the end of it. He then spoke of the 'acceptance, appreciation and honour' which he had received in the valley, including his appointment as an adjudicator in a first-aid competition at the local Eisteddfod. He continued at great length about the changes in medical treatment during his career: when he came to the valley there was no penicillin; he and his patients had used goose grease as an ointment to treat chest infections; and asthma had been rife. Now there was more emphasis on the prevention of disease, life expectancy had increased, and several diseases had been eradicated. He concluded by saying that he had loved every minute of his fifty years in the valley. The audience warmly applauded him and sang 'For he's a jolly good fellow', followed by three cheers. The women kissed him and the men shook him by the hand. At the buffet supper following the presentation one of the guests — who was a great-grandmother — told me that Dr Lionel had treated six generations of her family.

Commentary and Analysis

An examination of the ceremony reveals some elements of the culture and of the society of industrial south Wales and of attitudes to a Jew who was also 'a foreigner'. As a social anthropologist, I believe that it is right to stress broad structural concerns, but I am uneasy about relegating to a secondary role the place, the people, or the culture — as

some of my colleagues might recommend. The focus on the structural features of society in British anthropology and sociology has downgraded the place of culture in our studies, while American cultural anthropology has tended to focus on the nitty gritty of cultural specificity and to neglect the structural features.

One British response to the problem of combining cultural specificity with sociological generality is that of Anthony Cohen, the editor of *Belonging: Identity and Social Organization in British Rural Cultures.* Cohen argues that his concern with peripheral cultures need not be restricted to geographical peripherality but can include marginal areas — by which, presumably, he means economically and socially marginal areas.[5] The Welsh valley where the ceremony to mark Dr Lionel's retirement took place is one such marginal area. The audience knew that it had been difficult in 1940 to recruit and to retain doctors, that some had come but had decided not to stay. His patients were acknowledging not only his dedication and loyalty to them, but also his commitment to the valley. He had shown his identification with them and now it was hoped that he would remain among them after his retirement — unlike his predecessor and fellow Scot, Dr Andrews, who had left Wales when he retired. When he ceased practising medicine, there would be what Cohen had called 'the muting of social differentiation';[6] Lionel if he so chose could then be seen as a native of the valley — 'one of us' — rather than as a professional man.

Lionel had served the local community when its economy had been based on coal-mining and the men were employed in arduous, dangerous, and poorly-paid work. The miners had organized their own medical care through the Medical Health Council (MHC) before the National Health Service (NHS) was established and the gathering knew that he had actively participated in the MHC and later — unlike some other local doctors — had been an active supporter of the NHS. Whenever there was an accident, he had risked his own life by going underground to give medical help to those injured or trapped, and he had given expert evidence in court when miners had sought compensation for work accidents or for industrial diseases. Mrs Cooper, in her poem, had likened Lionel to an institution which had endured after the collieries and the working men's halls had been closed. He was so much of a fixture that they had taken him for granted but all good things came to an end. The coal-mines were no longer worked, but they were still a part of the collective folk memory, with physical reminders of their operation such as the pithead and its winding gear. Lionel was also now part of the collective memory, but moreover he was a living as well as an almost mythical figure who had cared for generations of patients in the valley.

In term of social class, ethnicity, and religion, Lionel was an outsider in a predominantly working-class Welsh, nonconformist, industrial

valley. But these points of differentiation became less significant since the community which he served assigned primacy to allegiance to the locality and to its residents. Lionel and his wife had manifested their loyalty to the valley over many decades, living among the patients, although their own children did not reside there. Indeed, even in this they were like many valley families, whose children had migrated to pursue their careers elsewhere. It was recognized that people differ and those differences were affectionately marked — as in nicknames such as 'Jack Twice' for a man whose name was John John. Lionel and his wife had not concealed their Jewishness but had first joined a Cardiff synagogue and later Swansea Hebrew Congregation and their Jewishness was acknowledged by singing in Hebrew and in Yiddish and by referring to their going to Jerusalem for their golden wedding. Lionel was not only Jewish, but also a Scot, and his Scots accent had been affectionately satirized during a tribute to him at the ceremony; but the very ability to tease him reflected the 'joking relationship' with his patients.[7] Moreover, the fact that Lionel was not English had created a further bond, because it stressed the solidarity of the Celts vis-à-vis the English. Indeed, Lionel told me that in his early days in the valley, he had apparently not been welcome as a Jew by at least one patient — who had just approached him after the farewell ceremony to confide that 50 years earlier she had asked Dr Andrews why he had brought a Jew to his medical practice in the valley and that Dr Andrews had reassured her by saying, 'There, there, my dear. No need to worry — remember, he's a Scot and different to the others'. It seems, therefore, that for some valley dwellers during the Second World War a Scottish identity had been more acceptable than a Jewish one and that with the passage of time such a stranger by virtue of his commitment to the people and the place can gain acceptance and yet retain his difference(s).

Lionel's position as a medical practitioner elevated him in terms of social status, but both he and his patients muted that difference. His fumbling and dropping of his notes during his speech did not diminish him in their eyes but on the contrary served to show that he was, like them, unaccustomed to public speaking and overcome by the occasion. The poem praising him mentioned his physical and personal characteristics, especially his short, squat stature and the consequent need to alter his ready-made clothes. This reference stressed his ordinary, man of the people, qualities. He did not distance himself from his patients. He told me that when he was starting in general practice, he was advised by experienced colleagues 'to make the patient feel important and to remember that it's the patient you don't see who dies on you', and he had therefore made a point of seeing all his patients and keeping in touch with them.

Lionel's junior partner, Dr Patel, had been practising in the valley for 16 years, but had yet to gain the acceptance which was

wholeheartedly given to Lionel. Lionel's senior partner, Dr Andrews, had apparently also not been fully accepted by the patients, although he had lived in the valley. It seems that this was because he behaved like a lord of the manor or a Scottish laird, and held banquets at his home for local dignitaries, while his wife organized embroidery classes for the wives of local professionals and of members of the gentry. He had started in general practice before the National Health Service began, when doctors were remote and powerful figures for their working-class patients; he knew his place and they knew theirs and the gulf between them was wide. Dr Patel was not only an Indian and a Catholic, but he also chose to live outside the valley, geographically distancing himself from the locality and its inhabitants. He dressed in impeccably tailored suits, in contrast to Dr Lionel who — as noted above — used the services of a local seamstress to alter the fit of his clothes. It was clear, from the confession that the patients did not feel safe when Lionel was away in Jerusalem, that Dr Patel did not enjoy the same confidence his senior partner had gained. Lionel had not forgotten his origins as a poor boy from the working-class Gorbals in Glasgow and he behaved as a man of the people, in a modest unassuming manner. The retirement ceremony itself could be considered as a rite of incorporation,[8] since it marked the end of his long period as a doctor and ushered in his new status as a neighbour of the valley dwellers. One of the two main organizers of the ceremony, the Labour councillor, made use of the social conditions prevailing when Dr Lionel had arrived in Wales as her main theme and chose the occasion to attack the Conservative government of the 1980s and 1990s, which had enacted legislation to compel doctors to retire when they reached the age of seventy. The Conservatives, she argued, had been responsible for much unemployment in the Welsh valleys and now even Dr Lionel had to find himself redundant, like so many of his patients.

Finally, the retirement ceremony served to celebrate local identity, and localism is a representation of group identity. In this particular case, the citizens of the valley were expressing resistance to their own communal extinction and were honouring the man who symbolized their solidarity.

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NOTES

[1] Max Gluckman, *Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand*, Rhodes-Livingstone Paper no. 28, Manchester, 1958 (first published in 1940 in *Bantu Studies* and in 1942 in *African Studies*).
[2] Ibid., pp. 2–8.
[3] Clyde Mitchell, *The Kalela Dance*, Rhodes-Livingstone Paper no. 27, Manchester, 1956.
[4] See J. B. Loudon, 'Kinship and Crisis in South Wales' in *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 12, no. 4, 1961, pp. 333–50.
[5] Anthony Cohen, ed., *Belonging: Identity and Social Organization in British Rural Cultures*, Manchester, 1982, p. 6.
[6] Ibid., p. 17.
[7] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'On Joking Relationships' in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, London, 1952, pp. 90–104. The article was first published in *Africa*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1940, pp. 195–210.
[8] See Meyer Fortes, 'Ritual and Office in Tribal Society' in Max Gluckman, ed., *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*, Manchester, 1962, p. 56.