CHAPTER 7

FROM CASE STUDIES TO SOCIAL SCIENCE: A STRATEGY FOR POLITICAL RESEARCH

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IN writing this essay, I have several audiences in mind: area specialists, comparativists, and those drawn to the use of game theory in political research. To encompass these diverse audiences, I cast this article as an exploration of the ways in which we comprehend. One theme of this chapter is that comprehension implies several different things:

* This chapter builds upon the works of Eckstein 1975; Stinchcombe 1968; and Przeworski and Teune 1970; and the later contributions of George and Bennett 1998; King, Keohane, et al. 1994; and Geddes 2003. Influential arguments by Achen 1986 and Sekon 2003 also shape the argument. To a great degree, the essay arises from discussions with Scott Ashworth while training graduate students in Gov. 3007 at Harvard University and with Avner Greif, Margaret Levi, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, and Barry Weingast while writing *Analytic Narratives* 1998. The author alone is to be blamed for its shortcomings.

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- Apprehension, or ***verstehen.***
- Explanation.
- Confirmation.

I shall briefly address each form of comprehension and demonstrate its role in the process of political research.

A second theme of this chapter is that comprehension, explanation, and confirmation interact; the product of the one influences the production of the other. Fieldwork and formal modeling; interpretation and statistical inference; deductive reasoning and empirical estimation—these emerge from the discussion as complementary activities.

In support of these arguments, I draw upon some of my own research into the role of agriculture in the political economy of development.

1 FORMS OF COMPREHENSION

The first form of comprehension is what I call apprehension and others ***verstehen.*** It is formed through experience, mobilizes intuition, and yields insights that lay the foundations for causal argument.

1.1 Apprehension

Importantly for social scientists, not only do we possess intellects, capable of abstraction and reasoning, but also social intelligence, capable of sympathy and insight. To explain political outcomes, we must employ both endowments.

Phrased in common language, we must "scope out" situations, see "where people are coming from," and "decode" their verbal expressions and body language. In the words of one political scientist, we must "soak and poke," or immerse ourselves in the lives of those we study (Fenno 1990). Anthropologists embrace this method: thus their use of ethnography (e.g. Amit 2000; Brizuela 2000) and their stress on interpretative methods (Geertz 1993). So too do historians, as they delve into the material, social, and cultural worlds of those they study.[1]

As with other forms of intelligence, social intelligence can—and must—be trained. It requires immersion. In some instances, this immersion comes naturally: those who study their "own" polities tend to be well attuned to their own cultures. But even in such

Brennan, Michael McGinnis, Lesa Morrison, Roger Parks, Michael Schoon, Suzanne Shanahan, and Lihua Yang. The excellent editing of Patty Lezotte and David Price has been of great help.

[1] Especially those of the annaliste school. I leave out the majority of modern social historians since, unlike Braudel 1980 they appear unwilling to entertain such additional steps as testing or modeling, as in the use of game theory.

instances, a more sophisticated understanding can be acquired through the use of ethnographic methods. To illustrate, consider the "new institutionalism," one of the most important innovations in the contemporary study of politics. A major variant of this approach emerged from the "Rikerian-side" of the Department of Political Science at the University of Rochester, with its emphasis on formal theory. But those who pioneered the approach were also students of Richard Fenno, who instilled in them an intimate knowledge of the folkways and byways of the committee system—knowledge he acquired from fieldwork on the United States Congress (Fenno 1966).

Fenno's field research targets a political arena, but one lodged within a culture of which he himself is a member. Immersion is even more necessary for those who study politics in cultures other than our own. We "foreigners" must virtually be trained in the same manner as have the adults of that culture. We must be infused with the collective memories and taught the shorthand allusions that inform the controversies that animate the politics of those that dwell within it.

The argument thus far constitutes a defense of "soft" approaches to learning, variously labeled intuition, insight, or ***verstehen.*** These approaches target the particular, be it a village, a committee, or a specific event. They are often counterpoised against "systematic" forms of understanding that seek general and therefore more abstract accounts. But rather than constituting rivals, the two approaches are complements.

The argument, like the research process, proceeds in stages. The first step comes in the field itself, when the researcher starts to find that she is less frequendy surprised. Behavior that once seemed inexplicable now appears ordinary; fewer interactions jar or unsettle. These changes suggest that the researcher is beginning to understand. The second step takes place as the researcher begins to separate from the field, both physically and emotionally. At that moment she begins to move from apprehension to explanation.

While moving toward explanation, the comprehension acquired during fieldwork continues to play a significant role. It informs judgement and sharpens intuition. Phrased crudely, it provides a "bullshit meter"—something useful for all academics and perhaps essential for graduate students. The study of politics is no less immune to the pathologies of discourse than are other academic fields, whether in the form of polemical exaggeration or scientific pretension. The best corrective is a confident mastery of a body of evidence and a sense of authority derived from having "been there." Such grounding yields an ability to discriminate between arguments that offer traction and those that are merely clever. It provides a means for discriminating between the trendy and substantial, and between those who simply want to score in debates and those who seek to contribute to knowledge.

1.2 Explanation[2]

The movement from apprehension to comprehension is marked by the recoding of what has been learned into an account that instills a sense of ***"therefore"*** The

[2] This section represents an extension and critique of Wedeen (2002).

researcher begins to apportion the things now known to be true between causes or consequences and to develop lines of logic to link them.[3] To illustrate, consider one form of explanation: that derived from game theory.[4]

Some games—indeed, some highly important ones—have been constructed solely to advance a theoretical argument. The prisoner's dilemma, for example, highlights the self-defeating properties of rationality in choice and the distinction between individual and social rationality (Barry and Hardin 1982). But game theory is also employed to model, i.e. to capture the logic that structures human interaction. Such explanations can and should be shaped by the understandings achieved through fieldwork and by the materials mobilized in thick descriptions. Grounded in the realities as experienced by other human beings, explanations move the researcher toward a sense of "therefore." The "therefore" to which game theory gives rise is a recognition that the behavior one seeks to explain is what one must of necessity expect, given one's understanding of the political setting.

Peopling this setting are actors with preferences and expectations who can make choices but who also face constraints. A key feature of a game is the presence and influence of other actors; the decision makers are not the atomistic actors of market economics. These actors are locked in patterns of interaction, so that the outcomes they achieve are the product not only of their own decisions but also of the conduct of others.

What is the identity of the actors? What are the values that inform their decisions? Given the stations they occupy, to what outcomes might they reasonably aspire? What ambitions might they seek to fulfill? What expectations do they hold, particularly of the conduct of others? If based upon the theory of games, the movement from apprehension to explanation requires that these questions be answered. This mode of explanation therefore demands a level of intimacy with the subject similar to that achieved by an ethnographer who has immersed herself in the life of "her" village or by a historian who has worked through the family papers of a politician or the archives of a bureau chief.

In game theory, the logic of explanation appeals to rationality in choice. The actions observed have been chosen strategically, i.e. knowing the sequence that will be followed and anticipating the behavior of others along the path of play. To account for the choices made, the analyst must demonstrate that the actor could credibly expect these choices to yield the best of the outcomes attainable, given what the actor could control, the constraints under which she labored, and the information then available. The re-creation of the world in which the actor is choosing, of how she operates within it, of the sequence of actions, and of beliefs about the consequences of her decisions provides the necessary data. The data may best come from observation, reading, interviewing, and thereby acquiring an intimate knowledge of the key players and the strategic environment that they inhabit.

The thick description provided by anthropologists, sociologists, and historians thus provides the underpinnings for the abstract, mathematical logic that moves the

[3] Note that the argument calls for logical—indeed, nomothetic—accounts. It is not sufficient to point to causal mechanisms (McAdam, Tarrow, et al. 2001) or to engage in "process tracing" (George and Bennett 1998).

[4] Among several excellent reviews, turn first to Dixit and Skeath (2004).

researcher from apprehension to explanation. Knowledge of key features of political life is essential to its recoding in the form of game. The theory of games provides a means of extracting explanations from such knowledge. Once the analyst has constructed the game, she then can begin to comprehend why outcomes occurred, i.e. why people behaved in the fashion she observed. Once formally modeled, the strategic situation captured by the game may yield equilibria; and these equilibria contain the choices that should be expected to prevail, if the model correctly captures the incentives that drive choices in the strategic setting.

In arguing for complementarities between abstract and qualitative methods, it is useful to point out that the kinds of reasoning employed in the process of "explanation" also contribute to the process of "apprehension." The assumption of rationality provides a source of empathy that enables the analyst to occupy the position of those whose behavior she seeks to understand.

The assumption of rationality imposes no requirements on the *content* of the values or preferences of the people being studied; in many instances they will possess values and aspirations far different from those of the analyst. But latent in the assumption is an acceptance of the possibility that were the analyst herself embedded in the structures and constraints that define the strategic setting, she too, if rational, would have made the same choices and suffered the same consequences as did those whose behavior she seeks to comprehend. In some settings, the result is confrontation with the question: "could I have possibly behaved with such humanity?" In others, it is the recognition that, "yes, in such a situation, I too might have killed." The premise of rationality thus transforms the relationship between the analyst and those being studied, imbricating it with sympathetic identification. It enhances the capacity to apprehend.

Many in the social sciences favor interpretation over explanation. Shunning the use of deduction and logic, they instead offer evocative accounts in which comprehension is achieved by appealing to preferences and mental states. Basing explanations on individual values is equivalent to asserting that a person behaves the way he does because that is the kind of person that he is. If the choice is irrational, then so too must he be. An advantage of game theory is that it offers a way of avoiding such tautology. In situations of strategic interdependence, people may easily become trapped: strategic interaction may yield outcomes that no rational individual would desire. Assuming that it is a harsh fate that we seek to explain, the researcher can then seek to identify the reasons people fail to transcend it. Given that the people are rational and capable of behaving in a sophisticated manner, why, then, do they continue to suffer? Driven by this question, the researcher will move from a study of the individuals and their preferences to a study of the game form, and focus on the forces that generate perverse results as equilibrium outcomes.

This discussion is of particular importance to those who study the politics of violence or underdevelopment. Observation suggests that many who are engaged in fighting or living in poverty are neither thugs nor incompetents but are nonetheless living in misery. The challenge posed is thus to isolate the features that divorce the qualities of the individuals from the properties of the lives they lead. In contrast to the common

perception that game theory emphasizes the role of choice, it in fact becomes most valuable, perhaps, when used to explore the forces that constrain human behavior.

1.3 Conviction

Thus far two forms of comprehension have been explored. The first is apprehension. The second—explanation—establishes the logical links that render the behavior one seeks to explain a necessary outcome. A major point of this essay is that the two forms of understanding are complements rather than substitutes: to endorse the one form of comprehension is to underscore as well the importance of the other.

The process of comprehension cannot terminate at explanation, however. More needs to be achieved before the researcher can accord credence to her account or elicit conviction from others. The account must also find confirmation. It must yield outcomes that are consistent with the data and, in particular, data other than that from which it was first derived.

To address the process of confirmation, we move from the world of the ethnographer and formal theorist to the world of the methodologist. Two methodologies warrant special attention: the making of "small-N" comparisons—the controlled use of case studies—and the use of "large-N" methods—the statistical analysis of quantitative data.[5]

In addressing the process of confirmation, it is useful to marshal an example. Doing so allows us to revisit the relationship between immersion and explanation and to understand when a research program achieves a resting point: the point of conviction, where the researcher comes to believe an explanation to be true and when she is able to demonstrate its validity to others.

2 BY WAY OF ILLUSTRATION

From the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, I inhabited the world of coffee. I begin with a discussion of fieldwork I conducted in the coffee zones of East Africa and the search for explanations of the economic behavior of the peasants in that region.

2.1 Introduction to the Field

The district of Meru runs down the north-eastern slopes of Mount Kenya; that of Mengo straddles Kampala, the capital of Uganda. In the course of my research into coffee production in East Africa, I found, as have others, that many farmers failed to

[5] The best treatments remain King, Keohane, et al. (1994); Przeworski and Teune (1970); and Geddes (2003).

produce what they technically could produce—given their access to land, labor, and capital—had they been the maximizers of profits. In addition, I found the kinds of tensions often recorded in studies of peasant communities (e.g. Redfield 1960; Wolff 1966; Scott 1976): fear of neighbors, jealousy, and a commitment to sharing, be it of beer or food, time or companionship, or of hardship or an unexpected windfall.

Many had looked at such behavior and posited cultural roots for it. Writing in the 1980s, Goran Hyden (Hyden 1981), for example, attributed to villagers in East Africa an "economy of affection" in which leisure is highly prized and the benefits of companionship valued more highly than private gains. Those who fail to abide by the norms of the community, by this argument, are sanctioned and become the objects of gossip, rumor-mongering, and, quite possibly, violence.

Appeals to culture provide a possible explanation for the behavior of the coffee growers. "Soaking and poking," however, I encountered reason to believe that the behavior of the coffee growers represented a choice. Rather than being driven by cultural norms and therefore inflexible, their behavior represented, I came to believe, a strategic response to the forces about them, and was therefore susceptible to change.

In both Kenya and Uganda coffee production takes place within a thicket of public institutions: cooperative societies, agricultural banks, government departments, and research centers. Among the most powerful of these is the coffee board: a monopsonist that purchased coffee from farmers at a price that it set. To the coffee growers, the coffee board was the tax man. In conversations in homesteads or over beer, many growers, I learned, felt were they to produce more, they would simply be more heavily taxed.

Experience in the field thus suggested an alternative to a "cultural" understanding of the peasantry in eastern Africa. A strong preference for leisure could indeed dissuade farmers from profit maximization. But it appeared more plausible that their behavior represented a strategy: in the face of the behavior they anticipated from the government and their peers, it was reasonable for farmers to choose leisure over productive activity.

2.2 The "Small-N" Road to Conviction

I now faced the task of convincing myself that the explanation "worked." Fortunately, for me at least, both Kenya and Uganda had recently undergone changes in political regimes. I therefore could employ temporal comparisons to test my argument. In Kenya, power had shifted from Jomo Kenyatta, who was from the coffee-growing regions, to Daniel Arap Moi, who was not. In Uganda, a military invasion had driven Idi Amin into exile. I therefore had the opportunity to use data from political shocks to test my ideas about the behavior of farmers.

lomo Kenyatta had been a friend of the coffee farmer. While president, he had allied with GEMA—a powerful brotherhood of wealthy persons from the Gikuyu, Embu, and Meru communities (Widner 1992) within the Central Province of Kenya. Many members of this elite not only possessed coffee estates but also occupied offices in the agencies that governed the coffee industry. Because the interests of those in

power so closely aligned with those of the small producers, the latter believed that the former would act in good faith.

When Kenyatta died in 1978, Daniel Arap Moi became president. Coming from Rift Valley Province, Moi did not belong to GEMA; indeed, he feared it. In an effort to weaken the political power of the Central Province, he labeled GEMA "tribal" and disbanded the organization. Placing political hatchet-men in key legal positions, he used the power of the state to attack, rather than to support, the agencies that superintended the production of coffee (Bates 1997). When I conducted my research in Meru, I therefore encountered an industry that had been shorn of political protection. From my research I learned that the transfer of power had marked the beginning of the decline—both economic and political—of coffee production. An industry that had prospered under Kenyatta began to stagnate under Moi. And farmers that had once aggressively sought to maximize chose instead to "make do."

Uganda too had experienced a change of presidents: Milton Obote, backed by Tanzania's armed forces and an alliance of other politicians from Uganda, had driven Idi Amin from the State House into exile. As they positioned themselves to compete for power in the new political order, several members of this alliance had recruited their own armies. Into a world in which villagers already feared the encroachment of their neighbors, there now circulated an abundant supply of weapons. When I arrived in the field, Mengo had become militarized. From the maelstrom of conflict in Mengo I emerged convinced that African coffee growers not only chose between leisure and income, as cultural accounts would have it. They also chose between income maximization and military activity: if prosperous, one has to be prepared to fight in order to defend one's property. There were few signs of the economy of affection in Mengo.[6]

At the start of my fieldwork in eastern Africa, I therefore found reason to doubt "cultural" explanations of the behavior of villagers. While such explanations might account for the reluctance of coffee producers to maximize their incomes, they implied that such behavior was invariant over time. A theory that viewed their behavior as the product of choice implied that what was a best response under one state of the world might well not be under another, and their conduct would therefore change. As the world about the coffee growers changed, I found, so too had their behavior. Changing from the "accumulators"[7] of the Kenyatta years to the sullen satisficers of those under Moi, those in Kenya demonstrated that they could indeed change the way in which they managed their farms.

The peasants of Mengo also changed their behavior and in so doing challenged the cultural account. Once characterized as practitioners of the economy of affection, they became violent. They became attackers and defenders, opportunists and heroes, patriots and traitors, as their villages were swept into the currents of the war that lasted from the overthrow of Idi Amin to the installation of Yoweri Museveni.

[6] For a formalization of this argument, see Bates, Greif, et al. (2002).

[7] A phrase employed by local intellectuals to characterize prosperous peasants. See, for example, Kitching (1980).

Having been encouraged through conversation and conviviality to conceive of farmers as rational actors, I could conceive of the games they played with the government and with those about them. I could use the logic of games to infer how, behaving rationally, they would choose, given their beliefs about the conduct of others. In the world they occupied, backward induction would lead the farmers to consume leisure rather than expend costly effort in the production of coffee, and thus account for their economic choices. In a world of peace, it led them to adhere to the "economy of affection." In a world at war, their best response was to fight. I could thus comprehend their political behavior as well. By taking advantage of change over time, I was able to make comparisons that provided evidence supportive of my account.

But the evidence did not yet satisfy. For one, the data employed to test the explanation were drawn from the same sample as had been used to construct it. Moreover, if the explanation were powerful, then there should be additional opportunities for confirmation. For if powerful, the explanation should generate additional implications which would be amenable to testing. I therefore changed my location in the world of coffee and I changed the topic of my research. Moving from Africa to Latin America, I focused on the politics of policy making rather than on the economics of farming.[8]

3 MOVING OUT OF SAMPLE

To my surprise, I found that while coffee was produced in Colombia by small farmers, the government of Colombia did not treat coffee producers in a predatory manner. In contrast to the conduct of governments in Amin's Uganda, Moi's Kenya, and other portions of Africa, the government of Colombia instead offered farmers low taxes and high-quality services and helped the industry to maximize its export earnings. Peasant producers were treated as if powerful, not marginal in Colombia's political economy

Retaining the premise of rationality in choice, I attempted to account for this difference by taking counsel from relevant theories. Some (e.g. Olson 1971) addressed the politics of interest groups; others (e.g. Downs 1957) the politics of party competition. Both moved from citizen preferences to public policy outcomes, basing their reasoning on rationality in choice and the incentives that shape strategic choices in political settings. In Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, few governments tolerated "multipartyism:" most were single-party or military regimes. In this authoritarian environment, organized interests dominated the policy process. In Colombia, by contrast,

[8] A major reason for this move was to seek respite from the violence I had encountered in post-Amin Uganda. Moving to Colombia, I soon learned that violence was not an African problem; it was a development problem.

two major parties competed for votes and governments secured power by winning electoral majorities. By the logic of collective action, should policy result from competition among organized interests, farmers—being numerous and disorganized—should lose out. In the context of electoral politics, numbers become an advantage; and should other conditions prevail (see below), they could become politically pivotal and so gain a political advantage. The comparison of policy making in Africa and Latin America thus provided a test of the rational choice approach by providing a test of the theories of policy making to which it gives rise.

What I had found throughout Africa was a systematic pattern of political expropriation; the explanation appeared to lie in the logic of interest groups. The core of the political economy of most African states consisted of the government, urban-based industry, and organized labor; peasant agriculture occupied the periphery. The first set of interests was concentrated geographically, which lowered the costs of organization; the second was dispersed and thus faced higher costs of organization. Urban-based industries tended to be economically concentrated as well, with a few large firms dominating the market; by contrast, the agricultural industry remained virtually atomistic in composition and no single producer could reasonably aspire to influence prices. While urban-based firms possessed incentives to organize, for farmers, the incentives were weak (see Olson 1971 and Bates 1981).

What I encountered in Colombia, however, was the politics of party competition. The logic governing this process would be the logic of majority rule in spatial settings, which implied that if properly located in the political space that defined electoral politics, peasants could extract favorable policies from candidates competing for office.

My intuition thus suggested that the roots of policy differences lay in the structure of political institutions. Whether that intuition would yield an explanation depended, among other things, on the structure of issue space in Colombia and on the location of coffee growers within it. To explore this possibility, I turned to archival sources. I reviewed the issues that divided the two parties: the nature of property rights, the position of the Catholic Church, and the power of the central government. Positions on these issues proved to be correlated, I found, rendering the problem one-dimensional and giving rise to the possibility of equilibrium outcomes.[9] Politicians from the coffee zones, I further noted, had repeatedly proven willing to break from the left wing of the Conservative Party to join governments from the right wing of the Liberal Party—and vice versa—thus making and breaking governments. The structure of party competition in Colombia thus appeared to render coffee farmers pivotal. Politicians ambitious for office would indeed possess strong incentives to advocate policies designed to secure their backing. While the politics of interest groups may have reduced the power of farmers in Africa, in Colombia, at least, the politics of electoral competition magnified it.

Drawing new data from outside of the original sample and confronting the logic of rational choice in a domain other than that in which I had first applied it, I gained

[9] As a test, I presented this formulation to seminars attended by the most learned students of Colombian history. The stress was that of a doctoral examination; so too the sense of relief at having passed.

increased confidence in my explanation of the behavior of East Africa's peasants. But to convince others, I recognized, I needed more: I needed data that would enable me to control statistically for the impact of variables that I might have been unable to control when making "small-N" comparisons. I therefore began to look for "large-N" data that would yield unbiased tests of my ideas and ones in which I could have high levels of confidence.

3.1 The "Large-N" Road to Conviction

From the late 1940s to the mid-1970s, party competition in Colombia ceased, first yielding to military rule and then to a national front in which the parties shared power at every level—and in every branch—of government. In the mid-1970s, party competition resumed.

In Colombia, as in Africa, coffee exports are taxed. But in Colombia, unlike in Africa, a major portion of the tax is rebated to the coffee producers who employ it to build roads and to provide electricity, schools, and clinics in the coffee zones. The percentage rebated to the coffee farmers varied over time, however. Using time series data from 1939-84, I was able to relate the percentage rebated to the structure of political competition. To a degree significantly greater than would be likely by chance, I found, when governments were chosen as a result of party competition, the percentage of the revenue which coffee growers were able to retain increased on average over 12 percentage points; when they were not—as when the military held power—the percentage fell by over 20 percentage points. By controlling for other possible determinants of revenue collection and the kinds of errors to which time series data, by their nature, can give rise, I was able to test my argument linking political institutions to government policies toward agriculture.

Armed with the lessons drawn from the Colombian case, I then returned to the study of Africa. There I joined a team of researchers and gathered data on government policies and political institutions for forty-six African nations over a twenty-six-year period (1970-95). Included in these data were measures of policy choice. Governments that to a high degree substituted public bureaucracies for private markets we labeled the creators of "control regimes;" the policies of those that refrained from such intervention we labeled "symptom free." The data on political institutions recorded whether the governments were based on no-party, single-party, or competitive-party systems.

Over the full set of African cases for the period 1970-95 there was a close statistical association between the existence—or non-existence—of political competition and the choice of policy regimes (Table 7.1).

Because I was now employing statistical methods, I was able to control for the impact of unobserved variables. In contrast to small-N investigations, by introducing fixed effects into a statistical model, I was able to eliminate the impact of features not captured in the model that might influence policy choice in one country but be absent in another. And by controlling for period effects, I was able to control for

Table 7.1 Fixed effects logit estimates

	1 Control regime	2 Syndrome free	3 Control regime	4 Syndrome free
No party	1.030 (2.53)	-0.169 (-0.35)		
Single party	2.730 (6.25)	-1.869 (-3.75)		
Military government			2.286 (5.44)	-0.644 (-1.29)
1975-9	1.212 (3.02)	-4.600 (-4.18)	0.475 (1.16)	-3.977 (-4.57)
1980-4	1.222 (3.01)	-4.124 (-4.8)	0.303 (0.73)	-3.440 (-4.41)
1985-9	-0.149 (-0.4)	-1.013 (-2.28)	-1.228 (-3,01)	-0.552 (-1.12)
1990-4	-2.509 (-6.41)	0.925 (2.59)	-1.228 (-3.01)	1.792 (4.23)
>1995	-2.579 (-4.00)	1.222 (2.04)	-3.749 (-7.94)	2.432 (3.49)
No. Observations	675 17	525 19	620 14	499 16

Note: Z-scores in parentheses. In computing standard errors, clustered by country.

variables that would affect policy making in all countries and that varied with time: the debt crisis, for example, or the oil price shocks of the 1970s—or changes in the price of coffee.

My research had thus focused on public policy toward farmers. Immersion convinced me that coffee producers in eastern Africa were canny strategists. Based on this premise, I was able to account for their economic behavior and the political fate that befell them. To convince myself and others, however, I had to demonstrate that the logical implications of my account were consistent with observable data and, in particular, data other than that which gave rise to the original interpretation. Drawing from the experience of another continent, I was able to show that differences in political institutions indeed related to the fate of the coffee industry and in ways that the logic would suggest. By drawing data from the politics of the coffee industry, I was able to increase my confidence in my analysis of the economics of peasant production. And by moving from small-N comparisons to data more

amenable to statistical treatment, I was able to impart greater credibility to my account.[10]

4 CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have sought to present a strategy for comparative research. At the beginning is immersion: a deep study of a time and place. The movement from insight to explanation is marked by the production of theory. The resultant explanation may be logically coherent, consistent with the observations that inspired it, and faithful to the original intuition. But to be convincing, the explanation has to be demonstrated. It has to find empirical confirmation.

To comprehend the political world about us, we therefore need to engage in qualitative research, to mobilize theory, to make small-N comparisons, and to employ statistical methods. Each task provides an element of what we need to know in order to comprehend. Only when all have been deployed can our efforts come to rest, our intellects feeling satisfied.

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