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## Summer Roundup: The Ethnographic Case, Part 2

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By Deanna Day

In June, we debuted an extensive new series on *Somatosphere*, [The Ethnographic Case](#). Edited by Emily Yates-Doerr and Christine Labuski, the series is organized on an expanding, virtual bookCASE, with each individual piece expanding our understanding of case studies — what they are, what they can teach us, and what work they do shaping both our objects of study and our academic fields.

### [“He didn’t blow us up”—routine violence and non-event as case](#)

*“This case is a story that a soldier told me. I call her Kelly, and she said it was ‘the craziest story I was gonna get’ from her. So for her it was an extreme, a worst case, but also a kind of telos of conditions she lived with and feelings she felt every day in occupied Iraq. It was a case of something not happening. As is fitting for those tensions of normalcy and emergency and rule and suspension that characterize state violence, it was both exceptional and part of a pattern: the pattern of soldiers’ embodied terror and vulnerability (even as they surely inspired terror in vulnerable others) and the pattern of the mechanisms that shaped their thought and action. It was a case of something that might have happened to Kelly but didn’t, that she might have done but didn’t do, and of things that were treated as if they were real even when they turned out not to be.” —Ken MacLeish*

### [What’s in a name?](#)

*“‘You can write if you want,’ Estrella gestures to my notebook that sits on the table. I write instead on a napkin. It feels less official and thus less obtrusive. ‘Unless you prefer napkins... This is what you call anthropology?’ She laughs and pats my hand, pen frozen on the flimsy paper. I look at my scrawl on the napkin. I*

*have written the date, her chosen pseudonym, and the location of the café where we sit. ‘Yes,’ I tell her. This is what I call my anthropological practice of ethnography. I bring out my field notebook, already swollen with the additions of drawings and pressed plants that women have given me... ‘Do you always ask people what name they want to use?’ She wanted to know. ‘Yes.’ At the time of this initial dialogue with Estrella in 2011, this was true.”—Ruth Goldstein*

### [Normalizing Sexually Violated Bodies: Sexual Assault Adjudication, Medical Evidence, and the Legal Case](#)

*“Between the nurses, social workers, police detectives, and crime lab analysts who are the most frequent expert witnesses participating in the trial, a variety of absences were explained away: the lack of injuries, lack of finger prints, imperfect DNA matches or the absence of DNA altogether, and delays in disclosure by victims of sexual assault. Whether compelling and insistent, or repetitive and tedious, the parade of witnesses who testify to the absence of evidence establishes that the lack of physical evidence is securely normal. The systematic materialization of the lack of evidence makes way for the testimony of the victim.”—Sameena Mulla*

### [Case by case](#)

*“The two friends appraised their respective narratives, taking turns like playing a game of catch. Although I had been conducting participant observation in this men’s caregiver support group for several months, and was aware that Yasuda-san’s mother and Takeda-san’s wife were both living with advanced dementia, this was the first time I realized that the men had also made the decision to give artificial hydration and nutrition to the ones they cared for. The ethical uncertainty of the decision lingered. Yasuda-san was worried that perhaps he was not merely preserving her life, but extending it too long. These decisions about life-extending care could only be appreciated, as the two men agreed, case by case.”—Jason Danelly*

### [Making a Case for Reducing Pollution in China, or The Case of the Ugly Sperm](#)

*“Was sperm an effective vehicle through which a case could be made for the regulation of pesticides and pollutants in China? It seems the DeTox Lab chose to first focus on male infertility partially because a broader discussion of post-industrial sperm decline was already occurring in many nations around the world. In China, the nuances of this conversation connected rising rates of male and female infertility to rapid social and economic transformations that had occurred since Reform and Opening began in the late 1970s. Under what the Chinese government called Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, the organization of economies, labor, and other aspects of daily life shifted. Male reproductive health specialists and media outlets listed lifestyle changes and increased stress as potential reasons for the accompanying post-Reform and Opening shifts in sperm counts: in one study, from approximately 100 million per ml in the 1970s to 40 million per ml in 2007. More recently, the degradation of Chinese sperm has been explicitly linked to a degradation of the ‘Chinese environment.’” —Janelle Lamoreaux*

### [Waiting in the face of bare life](#)

*“I want to consider the possibility that waiting one’s turn in line, what we might call waiting democratically, brings with it the threat of disarticulation from those social relations that give value to particular lives. Reflecting on Brazilians’ invocations and subversions of egalitarian waiting opens a window into a mode of suffering that liberal institutions sometimes elicit, especially in a context of austerity. In what Javier Auyero calls the ‘patient model’ of governance, the neoliberal state imposes long waits and thus ‘manipulates poor people’s time’ to produce their docility (Auyero 2012: 157). Here I suggest that poor people who inhabit democracy face another form of suffering, one associated with the threat of being reduced to bare life as they anticipate the materialization of their rights.” —Aaron Ansell*

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