



Ethnographic Vignettes

Social Change and Social Encounters in Solwezi, Northwestern Zambia

Rita Kesselring

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Frontpage:
Solwezi town,
Northwestern
Zambia.
Rita Kesselring,
2015-2018

Multiplicity of
water practices in
Solwezi.
Drawing by Julia Hohn,
January 2018

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Introduction: Vignettes, Social Change and Solwezi Town

Field course 2017/18

Rita Kesselring

What is social change, and where is it coming from? How can we see it when it happens, and is there ever any moment of time where there is no change? Societies never stagnate, of course, but is there something like accelerated change or the beginning of social change? What are the conditions for it? And how can we not only recognise it when it happens but also relate it to a readership?

These questions shaped our discussions during two terms in the seminar rooms of the Chair of Social Anthropology, University of Basel and – albeit in the background – during six weeks of guided field research in Solwezi town in Northwestern Zambia (and in one case in Alice Springs, Australia) in January and February 2018.¹ In this Basel Paper issue, master students in Social Anthropology and African Studies present the results of this enquiry.

The issue's contribution is threefold: First, it engages with the question of how to present social change with the help of vignettes, second, it offers a diverse tapestry of insights into a central region of today's capitalist world and, third, it attempts a refinement of the ethnographic method of participant observation.

Vignettes as a means to study social Change

A vignette is a genre whose inclusion in ethnographies is common practice in anthropology. Vignette is a loose term, though, and we do not intend to give a final definition of its style and possibilities. Rather, we focus on what we can do with vignettes. The most famous vignette – although not called this way at the time – is probably Max Gluckman's *Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand* (1940), in which he describes the opening of a bridge in today's KwaZulu Natal, South Africa in the late 1930s over nine pages in detail. This allows Gluckman in the subsequent, longest part of his essay to embark on an analysis of the divisions between and within the black and the white community, tax collection, labour migration and recruitment, the contradictions of the colonial state, but also the in/equilibrium of a specific social structure and the coexistence of conflict and cooperation.

The combination of the initial “naked” description of a social situation followed by a long analysis of what can be extracted from it is a method called extended case method, which Gluckman initially developed and which Jaap van Velsen further extended into situational analysis (1967). Their motivation for this new way of presenting research data was to move away from (functional) structuralists' method with their often decontextualised abstractions.

This shift in anthropological writing was also a reaction to societal challenges such as colonialism, urbanisation and industrialisation, whose effects Gluckman, Van

1 We would like to acknowledge the generous financial support from the Freiwillige Akademische Gesellschaft (FAG), the Centre for African Studies and the Chair of Social Anthropology, University of Basel. Jessica Näf and Mbaraka Matitu, two students who did not contribute to this issue, also participated in the project course 2017/2018.

Velsen and their colleagues at the Rhodes Livingstone Institute (RLI) and the Manchester School did not want to ignore anymore. One of their premises was that conflict is the rule rather than the exception. As a consequence of their focus on what people do and not on what they are supposed to do, the notion of social structure started to disintegrate into an interest in social process or social change. Key to the study of social change as pursued by these anthropologists is the belief that a social situation anywhere is always embedded in a “broader, world historical context” (Burawoy 1998, 5). Michael Burawoy, a student of Van Velsen, describes this as “extending out from the field” (1998).

For this issue, we take inspiration from the extended case method. Each contribution describes a social situation (vignette) and subsequently offers an analysis and theorisation. A vignette is often a social situation made sense of after the actual event, and is subsequently re-written and polished for its use in a specific text. Four points guided our writing. First, vignettes are never simply an illustration. While they are carefully chosen, the author should in theory be able to produce a number of additional social situations where the same issue is at play, or, as Gluckman said: “I have presented a typical sample of my field-data” (1940, 9). Second, a vignette can stand for many arguments. It is the discretion of the author to lead the reader into a certain direction. Third, a vignette ideally allows the reader to come to a different conclusion than the one presented by the author. In Gluckman’s words: “I am presenting this detailed material by which it can be criticised” (1940, 2). Fourth, a vignette allows the author to write herself or himself into the text; not as key determinant but as a participant who has shaped a specific situation just like everyone else.

Solwezi Town in Northwestern Zambia

Solwezi was not a town where RLI or Manchester School scholars conducted their research although they were only 200 kilometres away in the Copperbelt towns in then Northern Rhodesia. Solwezi did not follow the almost legendary growth of the Copperbelt mining towns in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s and did therefore not qualify for research into industrialisation and urbanisation. It only received attention as a new mining town in the 2000s.

Strictly speaking, Solwezi town is not a new mining town. In fact, it was the first outpost for the British South Africa Company to explore mineral deposits in the broader region in the late 19th century, and in 1908 Kansanshi mine was operated as the first commercial mine in the Central African region. Its significance reduced rapidly once the rich and easily accessible ore in the Katanga region (in today’s Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC) and the Zambian Copperbelt was found, though. Solwezi’s history diverges considerably from the Copperbelt towns established in the 1930s and 1940s; it completely missed out on the infrastructural boom of these years.

Solwezi town has however grown throughout the 20th century, it became the province’s capital and developed a type of urbanity different from the Copperbelt towns. While Kansanshi mine was intermittently open, it largely remained – socially, economically and politically – disconnected from life in Solwezi town next-door. Despite this non-synchronicity, Solwezi town and Kansanshi mine share a history; and since the most recent resource boom of the 2000s, Kansanshi mine and Solwezi town cannot be separated empirically, analytically or spatially.



Tour of Kansanshi mine, Solwezi.
Rita Kesselring, February 2018

Like elsewhere in Zambia, Solwezi has witnessed little infrastructural development since the global recession of the 1970s and the liberalisation and privatisation of the mining sector in the 1990s. Maybe this lack of infrastructure is part of the reason why life in Solwezi town is directly affected by the current extractivist cycles of boom and bust. Small changes, like a new road or a new suburb for mine workers or the mine's management, have a great impact in a town where most people have to cope with little municipal infrastructure.

Life in town would however also continue if the mine closes. Ordinary urbanisation processes taking place in the rest of Zambia have shaped Solwezi town, and it would not turn into a “ghost town” since many people have made Solwezi their home unrelated to the largest employer in town.

The most remarkable aspect in Solwezi which indeed distinguishes Solwezi from other towns in the region is its unprecedented growth, though. Between 2000 and today, Solwezi's population grew fivefold from approximately 50 000 to 260 000 residents (Preuss and Schmidt-Eisenlohr 2016); a fact which can be attributed to the lack of employment across the country and the hope for work and employment in a region where the biggest share of foreign direct investment went since the early 2000s. This investment did not benefit the ordinary resident in Solwezi but rather went into ensuring the smooth extraction of copper and gold (Kesselring 2018).



Solwezi town seen from a water tank.
Rita Kesselring, May 2015

The first five contributions in this issue each portray an aspect of life in Solwezi to the reader, framed with conceptual and theoretical anthropological discussions. The mine shaped our research stay in Solwezi – we participated in a tour of Kansanshi mine, for instance – but all in all, we took the approach to study everyday life in town without prematurely succumbing to the easy grand narrative that everything happens because of the mine. As the reader will see in the contributions, though, in almost every research project, the mine did play a role because residents' lives are affected by it. In this regard as well as in any other regard, we chose an inductive approach to the question of Solwezi's urbanity (Förster 2018).

Julia Hohn gets us started with a close examination of ordinary life in Solwezi. Water structures everyday life, as Julia shows, both at the household level and in terms of social differentiation across Solwezi town. Water takes on a variety of values, qualities, meanings and uses depending on the context, and is therefore an ideal element through which to examine intimacy and solidarity on the one hand and segregation and differentiation on the other. Her locale of enquiry is a social situation in front of a house where a mother and her children wash clothes and clean dishes as a joint household chore. Water becomes a necessary and playful element in this practice; but it can never be taken for granted as water is scarce, sometimes far away and potentially polluted. These qualities structure life and possibilities in the household and beyond. While water practices have a strong habitual dimension, as Julia shows, they can also become the origin of criticism of a larger unequal system and thus a call for change.

Just as water shapes every resident's life, so does language. In her contribution, Carole Martin examines language use in schools. As a result of Solwezi's growth, the language situation has changed, and school teachers are often overwhelmed by the multiplicity of languages spoken by their pupils and have to deal with their own language deficiencies when transferred to Solwezi. A new national language policy stipulates that the first few years of schooling are taught in the local language Kikaonde. Language use on the street goes the other way, though: English and Bemba, the dominant language spoken in the Copperbelt towns, have grown into lingua francas in Solwezi. Language change is a classic indicator for social change. Based on her close examination of language use in schools, Carole shows how language use changes slowly and not necessarily unidirectionally. Each individual, teacher and pupil, skilfully adjusts to and shapes complex social situations in the midst of ongoing change.

Farming, equally, is something almost every resident in Solwezi engages in, ranging from an herbal garden in town to a field further away on customary land. Monika Huber's field of enquiry are agricultural (subsistence) practices and training programs offered by the mine's Foundation and the state's Ministry of Agriculture. Their training focus and the motivation for offering trainings to subsistence farmers differ, though. The Ministry has a mandate to support farmers and connect them to the market. It does so with limited funds and with limited success and reliability. On the other hand, the Foundation has decided to offer courses to farmers as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility programme, which is well funded and exerts considerable influence on farmers' perspective on agriculture. Farmers fall between these two ideologies and have to find their own way of feeding their families. They make complex decisions considering factors such as climate change, the size and quality of their land and access to water sources. On the one hand, farmers stick to their well-tested practices (which might be described as traditional), on the other hand, they are influenced by (unreliable) state programs and the luring of the mine's well-financed programs for conservation farming. Social change, Monika seems to suggest, happens as a result of these different – and often contradicting – discourses and practices.

At the core of Anna Karsko's study are musicians in Solwezi. Music is of course a hobbyhorse of scholars of social change (Mitchell 1956). She is interested in how societal hierarchies between different groups play out and are formed in social encounters around musical practice. She closely looks at an audition where aspiring musicians and theatre/movie performers present their skills in an environment imbued with power relations. She shows how these young people are caught up in a double-bind which we know from music scenes across the world: in order to pursue one's dream of doing art for art's sake, one has to engage with those who potentially compromise the purity of art. Social change, Anna seems to argue, can potentially come from art practice, but it happens within the societal constraints any member of society is necessarily part of.

In her contribution, Anna-Sophie Hobi brings together, somewhat unusually, the notions of governance and luck. She describes a situation where strong power relations play out between representatives of a youth group and the town clerk. She shows that, for civil society activists, gaining the attention of a high-ranked official is one of the key entry points to effect social change. Whether or not the attention-seekers are successful, is, as Anna-Sophie proposes, a question of persistence, luck, and the skilful engagement in governance processes. "Being there" is thus not only the anthropologist's call (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009), but could also be understood as a rule for civil society activism in post-colonial settings with an underfunded and overwhelmed (local) state.

Methodology

The contributions in the second part of this issue focus on questions of methodology. The authors reflect on their positionality and refine the methods of ethnographic research. Methodology has been a major concern at the Chair of Social Anthropology in Basel (Förster 2001; Förster et al. 2011; Förster 2014) and was a key focus in the training leading up to the field research on which these contributions are based. In short field stays in particular, one is completely dependent on people's goodwill to find out something meaningful. With limited time, there is the danger of doing quite the opposite, though, and trying to control the outcome of one's research from the very beginning – in the hope to at least have something "factual" to take home. Part of the challenge of a short research stay is hence the necessity to open up to where people lead you from the very beginning. This can be anything from confusing to unsettling; and perseverance and trust are important ingredients here.

This dependency on other people is not just a wise strategy when faced with time constraints but is the core of how we understand the practice of anthropology. Relying on someone else means to pause, listen, and participate in what he or she is doing, with the aim of slowly adopting a different perspective of the world. Even in a short period, we can try to be attentive to moments when our perspective on things shift with the help of our interlocutors. There is the possibility that we share something – a slice of an outlook on the world – momentarily precisely because we share mundane daily activities (Kesselring 2015). Vignettes are a good way of presenting this shift in awareness and attention, because the author can write herself or himself into the narrative while keeping the focus on the content of the discussion.

The four contributions in part two reflect on power, intersubjectivity, relationships and patience as elements of participant observation, while speaking about as diverse issues as refugees, TV culture, carpentry and art production.

Misato Kimura draws a parallel between her experience of obtaining permission to conduct research in a refugee settlement one hour's drive west from Solwezi town, and refugees' experiences with the power of papers in their daily lives in the settlement. In other words, access, both into the settlement and the continuous fostering of her hosts' (UNHCR) goodwill, was a condition she shared with refugees to a certain extent. For refugees, obtaining a gate pass to legally leave the settlement for a limited period of time turned out to be an emotionally draining but central dimension of life in the settlement. Either way, whether one complies with the rules or not, one has to engage with the attempt of the Zambian state to control one's movements. This means to either stay in the settlement, leave legally for a couple of days, or leave illegally, risking getting caught in Solwezi town and being jailed or exploited for bribes. Dependency and agency are a strange couple but they inextricably belong together for both the researcher and for refugees in a precarious environment. People constantly work against stagnation, but their attempts for social change are individualised by a bureaucratic and sometimes corrupt state.

In her contribution, Deborah Oliveira takes the daily ritual of watching Bollywood soap operas with her host family as a point of departure to reflect on the affective reactions that media narratives trigger and how they are able to create moments of shared intersubjectivity and interconnectedness. She explores the guilty conscience which spending her time in the intimate realms of the household during field research evoked and calls for a critical reflection on hierarchies of knowledge embedded in the private vs. public dichotomy which shape our knowledge production – an epistemological project that feminist ethnographies have long pursued and which is worth being revisited, as she argues.

Aurel Everwijn, impressed by the way his perspective on the chosen subject matter – carpentry – has been shaped by the relationships he has formed in the course of his field research, calls for more attention to the ways in which relationships are formed in ethnographic encounters. He does not stop at relationships between persons but suggests to extend the enquiry to relationships between a person and “a thing”. Aurel shows how his perspective on wood and its potential has grown as a result of his apprentice work as a carpenter and the close attention to his teacher's movements (and sometimes words). New insights, it seems, can come from a splinter which our inattentive or inexperienced planing produces. We acknowledge the skills of the other, halt, and adjust our own practice to what the other has unwittingly shown us.

Michèle Monnier, who went to Alice Springs in Australia at the same time as the rest of the group was in Solwezi, was primarily interested in the continuation of an artistic style, that of Aboriginal artists, rather than its rapid transformation due to a changing global market. She observes and eventually interacts with artists as they compose paintings which relate to their memories, stories and social position. Michèle puts the emphasis on the possibility of conversing with people whom she struggled to access initially due to a societal setting she inadvertently was part of. Ethnography requires patience and the sensitivity and willingness to acquire new gestures and communication skills to be invited into the world of others.

Finally, in an epilogue, PhD candidate and colleague Anna Christen offers a reflection on “the good vignette”. Elaborating on the etymological origins of the vignette, she shows how vignettes in ethnographies have come to stand for a picture or “states of affairs” (Wittgenstein 1921) that show themselves. Vignettes, Anna argues, ask questions rather than answering them. She and all the contributors to this issue therefore invite the reader, with the help of our accounts of social change, to think ahead.



Election Day, Kimiteto Primary School, Solwezi.
August 2016

Roan Antelope Club House in Luanshya, Copperbelt, where Rhodes Livingstone Institute researchers A.L. Epstein and C.J. Mitchell, and American anthropologist H. Powdermaker conducted research.
September 2017
Photos: Rita Kesselring





High cost area,
house and garden
with maize plants.
January 2018

Road leading from
the city centre to
the neighbourhood
Urban Extension.
February 2018

Cooking dinner:
Nshima (maize),
with okra soup, red
beans, fried chicken
and sweet potato
cubes.
March 2018
Photos: Julia Hohn



Part I

Social Situations

Water and Sociality in Solwezi: Washing as a Water Practice

Julia Hohn

How does water shape people's relationships? Scholars conceptualise water as both a connector and a separator of people (Borg Rasmussen and Orlove 2015). What do these separating and connecting effects mean for Solwezi residents who carry out everyday water practices in a household?

One morning I visited our neighbouring family which counts seven children: three girls and four boys. The four younger children often visited us in our house. They would come and say hello and sometimes we would sit together on our porch, drink tea and eat biscuits. The oldest girl was twelve years old and her name was Sarah¹. She is followed by ten-year old Beatrice and five-year old Joyce. The youngest child is Lawrence, who was three years old. Here I present a revised version of an excerpt of fieldnotes written later that day.

A small path leads from the main road to their house and I paused at its beginning. I saw Sarah, Beatrice and Joyce in front of the house, sitting around a washbasin filled with clothes. Next to them were their mother and the three older brothers sitting on chairs listening to music. Lawrence curiously watched his sisters. Sarah lifted her head and beckoned me over. As I approached, the mother said, "Welcome." I sat down next to the girls and Beatrice explained that they were washing her clothes. Next to them was a bowl filled with dirty clothes from where the girls picked one piece after another and put them into the already brown water in the washbasin. They stretched the pieces between the hands, shifted the right hand to the left forearm and quickly rubbed the two endings up and down. The piece was repeatedly plunged into the water and, if necessary, dipped into the soap. The soap produced a lot of foam and bubbles. Sometimes, Beatrice would shape a hollow with her hands and take some of the foam only to blow it away. When they needed more water, Sarah stood up and fetched a bucket from the well in their garden.

My friend Carole from our group of students came over to greet the family as well. After a while she asked whether we could help with the washing. They kindly let us participate and imitate their movements. From time to time they interrupted to correct or help. It took us the same time to wash one piece as the others needed for two or three. Suddenly, Lawrence caught our attention by climbing into the bowl with the piled, dirty clothes and nestling down in it. When his mother noticed, she laughed out loud. Joyce, seemingly tired from her work, bedded herself on an empty sack on the muddy ground and covered herself with a chitenge². I saw her sandals neatly arranged next to the sack.

After a while, Sarah stopped washing and went inside the house to get another big basin, this time filled with dirty dishes. She took them to the garden, spread them on the grass around the bowl and

1 All names are anonymised.

2 A chitenge is a colourful piece of cloth.

filled water into two other smaller basins. She used the first one to wash the dishes and took a soapy piece of cloth as a sponge. She quickly lathered every plate, cup and pan. Sarah then poured some water with her hand on the dishes to remove the foam. The other basin served as a deposit for the washed dishes. From there she placed the pieces back again into the big bowl. She proceeded this way until she was done with all the dishes. Sarah was standing while she was washing and constantly moved between the different basins. Meanwhile, Beatrice went to get the scrubbing brush to remove the persistent red dust from her jeans. She spread it on a small wooden bench and rubbed forcefully. When there were no more clothes left to wash, Carole and I stood up and said goodbye. Before we left, one of the older brothers showed us the guinea pigs in a small stall next to the house. He let us hold one in our arms. The fur was tousled but soft.

Washing as a water practice is part of everyday life in Solwezi. Women, men and children acquire situated knowledge through everyday activities connected to the use of water for household chores (Bishop 2015). The vignette above shows that part of the specific knowledge consists of sensory skills which are used when washing: mastering the movements, rubbing the clothes sufficiently to remove the dirt but not as much as

Sarah and Beatrice
(on the left) heading
to the road with
friends.
*Carole Martin, January
2018*



to damage the cloth, dosing the soap, not spilling the water and getting wet. Washing is manual labour where the body has direct contact with water, unlike washing clothes in a washing machine. Conducted on a regular basis, people know how to wash quickly and with deft movements. Although observing thoroughly, I was not able to wash in the same manner.

Washing and the drawing of water from the well are time-consuming and physically tough jobs. The girls in the vignette were sitting, but some people in other situa-

tions were standing, bent down, with a straight back. Clothes get dirty quickly because of the red dust whirled up by cars on the streets which means that washing has to be carried out daily. However, the situation also shows that people do not relate to water practices as only work. The children in the vignette playfully blow soap bubbles with the water and use the clothes in the washing basin as a hiding place. Also, I often heard women sing when fetching water from the well.

Water practices are social practices. In the vignette, the whole family is gathered around the practice of washing, it is thus embedded in a social setting. The brothers, who were not directly involved, spent this morning hour with the family. Joyce, when she stopped helping, did not go inside the house or somewhere else but remained with the others, lying down on the sack on the ground. The water practice as a starting point was complemented or followed by other activities, such as listening to music, washing the dishes or taking out the guinea pigs. Thus, Beatrice's duty of washing her clothes involved other family members through either helping or sharing their time and presence with her.

I waited at the beginning of the path to the family's house until I was invited in because I did not want to intrude. The atmosphere was private in the sense that the whole family was sitting together. Until that point, I did not know the mother very well but mainly the girls. Still, they welcomed me and opened the setting for other people. Furthermore, the washing took place outside. Interestingly, the girls did not wash behind the high maize plants in their garden, where they would have been granted more privacy and also been nearer to the well, but right in front of their house. The washing happened at the beginning of the path and was visible from the road. Nikhil Anand, in his ethnography on water and infrastructures in Mumbai (2017), points out that washing outside extends the homes beyond the four walls of his informants. In doing so, women blur the boundary between home and public space, effectively changing the area outside their doors as their own (Anand 2017, 111). Indeed, I could see the washing and the family from the road but still had the feeling that it was necessary to be invited in order to join them. The situation thus contained both private and public elements.

Both attributes to water – as a connector and a separator – can be analysed in relation to water practices. The connecting effects are interpretable in several ways from the vignette. The practice was embedded in a social setting, which involved all family members who were present and the playful elements. Furthermore, the washing took place in the open and was visible from the road, a fact which made participation possible. Being allowed to participate and by trying to imitate the manual movements, the practice became a shared sensory experience between the family and me.

Beyond the household, I often observed people, mostly befriended and neighbouring women, gather in the yard of a house. They would talk, quarrel, tease each other and laugh and the head of the household would often start washing dishes or clothes within this setting.

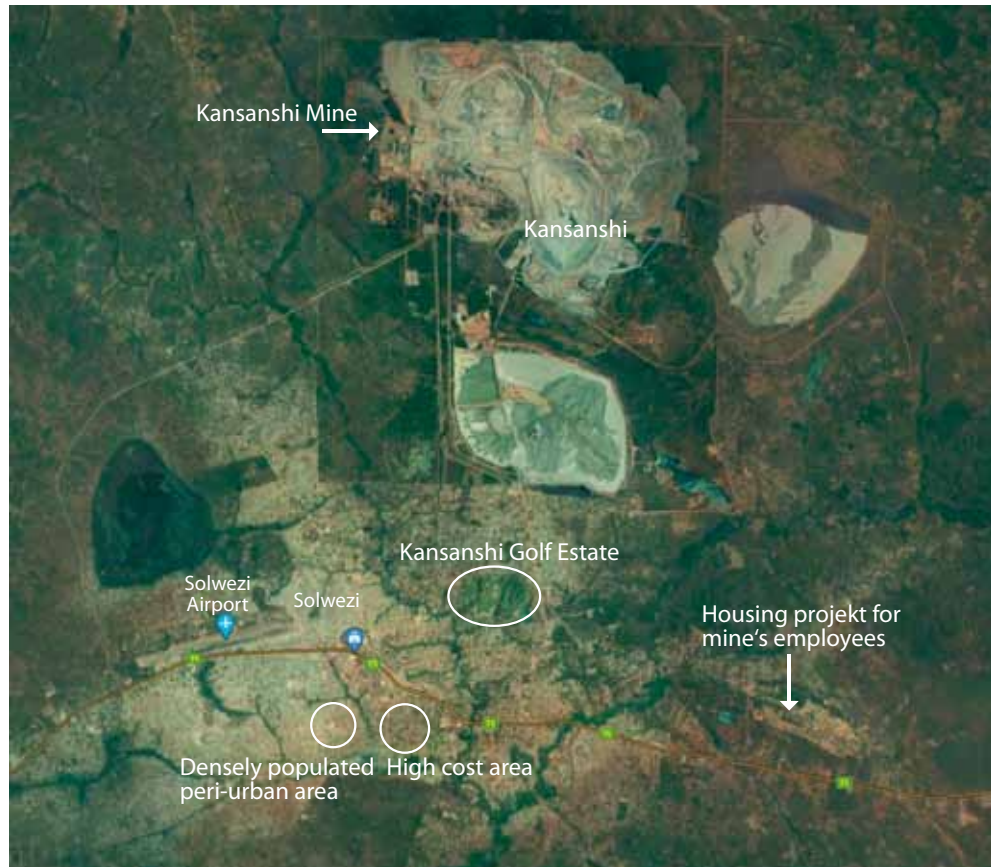
Water acts as a separator on a number of levels, too. The family's household is not connected to piped water, but its members have to draw it from the well on their plot or, depending on the time of the year, further away. Sarah told me that in the dry season the level of the groundwater would sink and that they then would have to fetch water from a stream. Additionally, the load of household chores prevents a considerable number of girls from going to school, and women from economic activities (Bishop 2015, 692; WHO 2017, 31). However, I was told that the family's two oldest girls are enrolled in education and that the older boys usually wash their clothes on their own.

Furthermore, the effects of water as a separator played out across milieus and urban suburbs in Solwezi. The majority of Solwezi residents, especially those in peri-urban areas, are not connected to piped water (Preuss and Schmidt-Eisenlohr 2016, 76-79 in Kesselring 2017, 7). People use rivers, streams, hand-dug wells and water kiosks as alternative sources. Not only is accessibility to water a problem, but also its

availability: the groundwater level in the urban area is sinking because of the Kansanshi mine's extensive use of water for its operations and because of low rainfalls in the dry season (Kesselring 2017, 7). Contrarily, in the private areas where the mine's expatriate employees live, water is readily available all year round in the households or for the irrigation of a golf course (Kesselring 2017, 5).

When looking at urban water practices, I believe that we should combine two levels: First, the mundane and constitutive engaging with any kind of infrastructure as a basis for lived sensory sociality. Second, separative mechanisms in terms of social differentiation in the household and across the urban space.

Screenshot from
Google Earth.
Julia Hohn, June 2018



Multilingualism, A New Language Policy and Language Practice in Primary Schools in Solwezi

Carole Martin

It is a cloudy Tuesday morning, 6:15am, and I begin my walk to Kikombe school on Urban Extension's muddy streets, carefully sidestepping the various puddles that have formed in the reddish soil during a night of rain. I am by no means the only early bird; numerous pupils are on their way to class, some eyeing me with curious glances, others amiably smiling at me. They wear different uniforms that I have started to recognise and assign to the corresponding schools, such as the light blue shirts and light grey skirts and pants that belong to the students of Kikombe, or the Beliya children's almost irritatingly pink shirts and dark green skirts and pants. It is still a little chilly outside and many of them have chosen to don their woollen sweaters on which the name of their school is usually embroidered.

I punctually arrive at Kikombe, a school supported by the Kansanshi mine that has only recently reopened after the prolonged nationwide winter holiday caused by a cholera outbreak. By that time, I have managed to receive official authorisation by the Ministry of General Education and been a regular visitor at three different schools for the better part of the previous two weeks. With my research interests in changing language use in Solwezi's multilingual society, schools proved to be an extremely intriguing vantage point from which to observe language hierarchies. Subsequent to a new national language policy passed into law in January 2014, teaching in the region-specific languages from grades one to four was decided on as a result of which Kaonde, the official local language of Solwezi District, has become the means of instruction for the early primary grades. As the vignette below will reveal, the use of Kaonde as medium of instruction is not only challenging for pupils speaking another language at home, but also for teachers, whom the government can transfer to any Zambian province without previous knowledge of the prevailing local languages.



Second-graders at Kikombe school.
Carole Martin, February 2018

This morning, the head teacher sends me to the second-grade class. The teacher is instructing her pupils in English in her math lesson and ends up code-switching to English a lot even during her Kaonde literacy class. She has only recently moved to Solwezi from the Copperbelt region and her first language is Bemba. The first-grade teacher, whose class of 50 small children I join after the break, is not native to the area either. She comes from the Western part of Zambia and is a native Lozi speaker, but she has lived in Solwezi since 1994 and teaching in Kaonde does not pose a problem to her anymore. She assigns me to a small seat at a desk close to the blackboard next to another teacher who is preparing her upcoming lesson. As I have already witnessed several times, the Kaonde literacy class starts with a song during which the pupils take off their shoes and, row after row, move towards the front of the room to sit cross-legged on the carpet to face the blackboard. Strictly speaking, they are not singing the song, but rather shouting it. They all end up squeezed together to sing another song about vocals and draw them in the air or on the blackboard for practice, indeed not an easy task for children who are so small that they can hardly reach the writing surface.

The students are sent back to their desks and asked to take out their notebooks in order to copy the lines of letters prepared by the teacher on the blackboard. Most of the pupils do not put their backpacks on the floor but will keep it strapped on during the whole lesson. Together with their concentrated faces, this makes them appear like little armadillos on a mission, especially the few determined perfectionists who walk up to the blackboard to count the exact number of letters presented in one line. Some children also have to get closer because their eye sight is not very good. The children are talking with their neighbours during the assignment, and I can distinguish some regional languages like Kaonde, Lunda and Luvale, but also Bemba and English.

The morning class is finished after the Kaonde lesson, and the 30 or so children of class 1b, the midmorning class, are already queued up in front of the classroom, the girls on the left and the boys on the right. They are allowed to enter as soon as the other students have left, and the teacher I have observed preparing for her lessons is taking over the class. The first activity is done in English, but the teacher then addresses the class in Kaonde and I hear her mentioning “Bemba” once. The other teacher translates

Waiting in line to enter the classroom.
Carole Martin, February 2018



and reveals to me that her colleague has reminded the pupils to stop using Bemba and speak Kaonde instead while the same ritual with the song and the gathering on the carpet recommences until all the children are seated again in front of the blackboard. This time, the class does not look at vocals, but the teacher tells them about different shapes which they have to recreate with chalk on the blackboard. Unlike the previous, but similar to the second-grade teacher, the teacher is code-switching very often between Kaonde and English.

The children are still assembled on the carpet as one of the girls lifts her hand and tells the teacher, in fluent English, that she does not understand the exercise since she does not know any Kaonde. The teacher, not visibly surprised by the girl's exclamation, repeats everything in English. Later on, when the students are at their desks again carrying out written assignments in their little notebooks, I walk around the class as I usually do to help the teacher with the marking. I ask the same girl why her English is that good and she tells me that this is what she speaks at home. It is not the first time I encounter this statement; anticipating better chances for future success, many middle-class parents have chosen to raise their children in English. When I compliment the girl on her accent, she does not accept it and instead expresses her difficulties with following the teacher's instructions in Kaonde and admits her shame at having to be the one who always needs further explanations.

Although the current approach of using local languages at Zambian schools as means of instruction has the potential to support language learning and student education overall, its implementation has produced new challenges in an area such as the Solwezi region where several local languages compete. At least two problems related to language use in a multilingual society that emerge in class are revealed in the above vignette: first, the teachers are often not equipped to speak the local language themselves, and second, the pupils might also not be fluent in the official local language since they either speak another local language or English at home.

Strategies that I have observed on that day that aim at overcoming linguistic misunderstandings mostly rely on code-switching to English, which is primarily done by the teachers, but under specific circumstances by students likewise. Teachers code-switch in situations where they are not acquainted with a specific word in Kaonde, and it might also be argued that they are just used to conducting lessons in English as this was normal before the passing of the new language policy in 2014. Something that I have observed in class which was repeatedly expressed in conversations with teachers is that, initially, they would have to learn the local language from their pupils. Overall, English remains the most important language in education despite its colonial connotations and is still often used in class by teachers and students alike instead of Kaonde.

The question arises of why primary teachers are not from the area and thus unable to speak the local language. As government employees, teachers are stationed anywhere in the country after their training regardless of their predominant language. Since Solwezi has grown substantially and the demand for teachers has increased accordingly, many teachers are not from the region. Besides, some have also intentionally decided to come to Solwezi in order to follow their family, a plan which can be accomplished if they find a teacher who is willing to swap in their stead. Being from the German part of Switzerland and imagining people's likely outrage if I were to teach their children in French without having learned it properly, I was surprised that the College of Education provides trainings that include methods as to how to teach a local language, but none about how to speak it oneself. Including actual language courses for teachers might enhance efficient class communication with students. Children are quick at acquiring new languages, but if their teachers are not properly equipped to teach them, the example of Solwezi discloses that the successful implementation of using the local language as means of instruction in a system where workers can be posted anywhere within the country must seriously be questioned in a linguistically diverse place like Zambia.

Several situations furthermore insinuate the emerging dominance of Bemba, the language spoken in the Copperbelt towns where many migrants to Solwezi originate. Consider, for example, the instance of the teacher reminding her pupils that they have to stick to Kaonde, and not Bemba. Although the new language policy aims at facilitating children's learning process, it might actually have complicated matters further for children who are not used to communicate in the local language at home, just like the numerous Bemba-speaking pupils at Kikombe. Bemba's increasing influence is especially striking considering that it is a language non-native to the Northwestern Province which has, according to the outdated literature, "been unable to penetrate the north-west" (Posner 2003, 140). However, due to more recent labour migration from the Copperbelt, Zambia's historic mining centre in which Bemba gained dominance as early as in the late 1920s (Spitulnik 1998), Bemba has started to become relatively common in the Solwezi region and can even be heard in classrooms.



Tumvwanai school. Motto: Learning as an investment.
January 2018

Toilet break at Kikombe school.
February 2018

An evening walk on Urban Extension's muddy streets.
February 2018
Photos: Carole Martin





Flooded street in Urban Extension, a compound in Solwezi.
January 2018

Flooded street in Urban Extension, a compound in Solwezi. In the background there is a small shop.
January 2018

A street near a market in Solwezi leading out of the city, with various smaller shops.
January 2018
Photos: Monika Huber



Agricultural Practices in Solwezi: Structures of Superiority, Hierarchy and Agency

Monika Huber

Steven¹ called me early in the morning and told me that his supervisor was ready to meet me. Tim, the supervisor, picked me up by car at 9:30. As we were talking about agricultural practices, Tim stressed that in Solwezi, most people must do subsistence farming to secure their livelihood. Leaving Solwezi by car, he explained the concept of conservation farming to me. The Kansanshi Foundation's farming programme is being implemented since 2013 and 30,000 farmers have been trained so far. 3,400 farmers received the seed for free because they could not afford to pay for it. Tim told me furthermore that the training was supposed to last only four years, but that the Foundation noticed that the farmers needed long-term support. In the first year, Tim pointed out, the focus was clearly on growing maize. The production of fertiliser would only be taught at a later stage. The farmers also receive theory lessons. When they are more advanced, they'll get more seeds (which they'll have to buy from the mine and no longer get for free) and they will grow different kinds of plants, such as cassava, groundnuts, maize, soybeans and green beans. The Foundation does not dictate what they have to grow as long as they cultivate according to conservation farming standards. Tim told me that the mine had started the programme for several reasons. The One of them being the mine affecting its environment negatively and therefore the company wants to give something back to society. In addition, the availability of land decreased since many people moved to Solwezi to work in the mine. For this reason, the farmers must learn to cultivate smaller fields, but still receive as much yield as possible. Conservation farming does not stress the soil and leads to larger yields. He criticised traditional techniques. Tim also stressed the importance of crop rotation. Different plants need different nutrients, because of the rotation the soil is not overstressed and can recover easily. He concluded that people should learn to take care of themselves, as the mine will not be open forever. He claimed that due to their intervention, an increase in maize production had taken place. Overall, he said, the mine and the teachings of conservation farming techniques had boosted agriculture and thus Solwezi's economy.

Two institutions influence agricultural practice in Solwezi today: The Kansanshi Foundation and the Ministry of Agriculture. As Tim explained to me, the Kansanshi Foundation started to implement an agricultural programme in 2013. They have been teaching farmers in conservation farming, which involves the modification of traditional farming methods to increase the yield of a plot. The Foundation aims at ensuring local food security. The Ministry of Agriculture focuses on conservation farming practices as well. When I was doing research on agriculture and food access in Solwezi, I was in contact with representatives of the Kansanshi Foundation working under the mine's Corporate Social Responsibility Department, the Ministry of Agriculture as well as people doing subsistence farming. My aim was to investigate the different roles of the key actors in the agricultural sector. They all have different approaches to agricultural production, different practices and demands. In what follows, I will present these various perspectives and analyze the power structures in this field.

The revised excerpt from my field notes above shows the impact the Kansanshi Foundation is trying to have on the lives of the people of Solwezi. Tim, an employee of the Foundation, instructed teachers around the town and occasionally visited farmers to check on their progress. This encounter gave me a chance to get to know Tim's opinion, which was influenced by the Foundation, and the relationship between the mine and the farmers. Firstly, Tim was aware that people must do subsistence farming

1 All names are anonymised.

to survive. However, he believed that people would only be successful in preserving their livelihood by learning conservation farming techniques. He expressed that only the techniques taught by the Foundation were correct. Secondly, Tim's statements show that the Foundation is teaching farmers to repair the damage caused by the mine, as an attempt to make amends. Thus, he acknowledged that the presence of the mine brought some disadvantages to the farmers, which needs mitigation. Thirdly, it became clear that while there was a hierarchy between the Foundation and the agricultural "students", the "students" kept their agency and were somewhat unruly. Tim criticised that farmers would return to conventional methods or stop cultivating if they no longer received financial support. He was critical of their reluctance to fully commit and mistrusted them. Tim represents how the Foundation understands its role in the Solwezi environment. By talking about "interventions", educating people and helping them through financial support, an understanding of superiority and the belief of having more knowledge reveals itself. The power imbalance is created by access to monetary means and an assumed knowledge gap.

A maize field cultivated by a student of the Ministry of Agriculture.
Monika Huber, January 2018



When I visited the provincial Ministry of Agriculture in Solwezi, I was able to conduct an interview with an employee of the District Agricultural Coordinating Office of Solwezi Walter Smith. In our interview, Mr. Smith emphasised that the mine's activity has affected people's lives. He told me that only a fraction of the people of Solwezi get employed by the mine and many people therefore must do subsistence farming, which is the only way for them to survive. The Ministry of Agriculture implemented several programs, which operate not on the household level but on the small-scale farming level. Mr. Smith explained to me that the government was setting the prices for the produce

and buys surplus from the farmers. The government thus exercises great power over farmers by regulating the market and determining prices. I realised in a later conversation with Andrea, an agricultural teacher for conservation farming, that the Ministry also controls which seeds the farmers buy. Farmers get seeds, fertilisers and pesticides at a reduced price, but they must buy them from specific “agrosuppliers”. When we visited farmers together, they had to sit in a circle, and she explained to them the correct use of the pesticides several times. She wanted to know how much maize they expected to harvest and whether they reckoned with a surplus. She lectured them and demonstrated her superiority in the way she spoke to them. The interaction was not between equals. This encounter with Andrea made clear how power is unequally distributed among the different actors. Furthermore, Andrea and Walter Smith independently told me that the Ministry wanted to cooperate with the Kansanshi Foundation. However, the Foundation was unwilling to do so.

These two described institutions do not directly engage at the household level, which, at the end of the day, are the ones who do subsistence farming. As I have learned during conversations with people doing subsistence farming, households practice a mixed crop culture, whereby they grow different plants in one field. People try to use all the space available by planting as much as possible during the rainy season. Many households are unable to cultivate during the dry season due to a scarcity of water and because of limited access to additional water sources such as rivers, streams or draw wells. One day, I accompanied my neighbor Claire, who is an employee of the Ministry of Education, to her fields outside town. When we planted potatoes together, she explained to me that many people in Zambia were uneducated and therefore must know how to do agriculture. Knowing practices of subsistence farming can prevent starvation and poverty in the event of unemployment. Good education is difficult to obtain, but agricultural skills can and should be acquired. Claire often plants different crops on a field. On the one hand, to take advantage of the limited space and on the other hand for certain plants, such as pumpkins, not to proliferate too much. When I spent time with Nicole, the daughter of another neighbor, I was able to get another insight into the cultivation methods of households. Her family used the maize stalks as climbing vines for beans. They planted vegetables between the maize plants to make use of all the space and water and to maximise the harvest. When I asked them why they did not use other methods, they told me that they did not know any other methods, that they had little money and space, that they had to plant as much maize as possible because this was their staple food. As seen in my household studies, many people only have access to small farmland and depend on rainfall, which makes conservation farming almost impossible.



In this garden the maize stalks serve as climbing vines for other plants.
Monika Huber, January 2018

The Kansanshi Foundation and the Ministry of Agriculture focus on farmers and do not directly intervene in households. According to the Foundation and the Ministry, farmers still tend to use conventional methods, even though they were “educated” by the two institutions. This indicates that farmers either perceive added value in traditional practices or that conservation farming is not fast and efficient enough or too expensive. Unfortunately, these are only speculations, since I could only talk to the farmers benefitting from the trainings in the presence of employees of the Ministry and the Foundation. These farmers stressed that the cooperation had given them an enormous opportunity and that they no longer wanted to “revert” to traditional methods.

It seems to me that there is not much interaction between the different groups of actors beyond the training sessions. It was, however, difficult to get insight into the relationship between these actors. What kind of effect did conservation farming training exactly have on household practices? There also seems to be little interaction between the two institutional actors: The Foundation has the financial power while the Ministry lacks financial resources. The ministry is thus unable to shape the farmers’ practice to the same extent as the Foundation does. The fact that the Foundation can refuse to cooperate with the Ministry is indicative of this hierarchy. Because the Ministry and the Foundation are suspicious towards the stance of farmers indicates that they see farmers at the bottom of the power hierarchy. It also showed that farmers make informed decisions which take into account access to resources, the size of the family and the weather. During my field research, I was not able to conclusively rank households in the overall power constellation. I believe, however, that we should not assume that farmers blindly copy the agricultural practices propagated by the two institutions. They must make complex decisions on a daily basis and know by experience that they can’t rely on the punctual distribution of seeds by the state or the commitment of the mine.

From Solwezi to Zollywood: Hierarchy and Dependency in a Theatre and Arts Group

Anna Karsko

During my six weeks of research in Solwezi, my personal interest guided me towards exploring the meaning and practice of music production in the rapidly urbanising town (Kesselring 2018a, 238; Negi 2014, 1013). With the assumption that the growth of a town has an impact on how people politicise, economise or simply talk about their music practices, I tried to tease out the numerous connotations and perceptions connected to the production of music in this vibrant setting. Following Bourdieu's notion of a "tug of war" between the autonomy of art and the heteronomous art situated in a "field of power" (Bourdieu 1993, 40-44), I focused on power relations, structures of hierarchy in the musical field, and the connection between production of and speech about art.

Working with words, dreams, and imaginaries, many musicians in Solwezi meander through the hopes for a prosperous career – between thorns of financial disadvantage, censures and the permanent pressure to situate themselves vis-à-vis influential institutions. Trying to get a grasp of these issues, I decided to accompany some of them in their everyday life during my stay in Solwezi. Through lucky coincidences, I had the chance to meet the Aza theatre and arts group and their artistic director Mr. Mbewe.

Being an artist himself, Mr. Mbewe leads a double existence on a professional level: "I consist out of two different persons. There is Mr. Mbewe, the teacher, and Azalaza, the musician". Mr Mbewe grew up in the eastern part of Zambia in a small village, to which he likes to refer to as "my village" and to which he fosters a caring relationship through constant financial support and numerous donations. After studies in music in Lusaka and the pursuit of many musical projects in the capital and elsewhere in Zambia, he was given the position of a music and sports teacher at the prestigious Trident College, a Kansanshi mine-based school for the children of the mine employees of higher ranks in Solwezi. In order to "create careers in the young people's lives upon which they can make meaningful living", Mr. Mbewe launched a self-written musical project called "Two Horizons" together with the Kansanshi Foundation, an arm of the mine's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) department.



Mr. Mbewe giving one of his speeches.
Anna Karsko, February 2018

I had the chance to be part of one audition and three rehearsals for this project. In the following vignette, I describe my first impression of the dynamics and structure of their gatherings.

The contestants of the audition arrived very punctually at 14.00 o'clock at the flat little buildings of the Kansanshi Foundation. Having a delay because of a previous interview at a Radio station, Mr. Mbewe had already called me to say that he is going to be a little late. "Is anyone there at all?", he asked me quite alarmedly because he was not sure if the publicity of the event had gone well. I reassured him that there were already about 25 people waiting for him to come and start the audition. "Please talk to them so they might not go away", he told me half-jokingly, half still not persuaded about the presence of the participants. In the meantime, I started some conversations about their professions and engagement in music. Most of them were living in Mushitala West, one of the better-off compounds near the Kansanshi mine. They all seemed to know each other somehow and there was a certain kind of energy and briskness in the air which promised fun, but also professional fulfilment through strong and ambitious people.

Yet, there was one person with a different aura than the others. The man, a CSR officer as I learned afterwards, was addressed with a high degree of respect and politeness, even though he was the one with no real relationship to music or acting. Right under the authority of Mr. Mbewe, the CSR officer was standing as a representative figure for the mine, being humbly referred to as "Mr". As Mr. Mbewe arrived, I sat with the large group in one of the classrooms the Foundation is using for continuing educational programs. Being leader of the theatre group, I felt a strong authority and rhetoric presence in him immediately. As soon as he entered the room, the air was filled with concentration, ambition, but also reverence. His bright smile correlated with the good mood present, and as he asked the young people to introduce themselves, I noticed that his secrets were his didactic talent and his experiences as a teacher. Each of the contestants stood up when introducing him or herself and shook Mr. Mbewe's hand, referring to him as "director" and listening carefully during his narratively loaded speeches. This voluntary discipline and high respect gave me the impression of being in a very motivated educational class.

20.01.2018, revised excerpt from my fieldnotes

Rabson memorising his lines shortly before the audition.
Anna Karsko, February 2018



This first encounter with the group of young and ambitious people showed me at a very empathic level how relationships and hierarchies are constituted in an institutional context where music and art are the key concern.

Lacking the financial ability to buy professional equipment, coupled with the general financial instability of the project, the CSR officer served as the promise of the Foundation's support. Although he remained in the background, people valued his selected words and showed a sense for humbleness when addressing him directly. I only learned some time later that even though most of the contestants were somehow professionally related to music, nearly half of them primarily worked in the Kansanshi mine.

Mr. Mbewe almost theatrically performed his role as a musical director. During his motivational speeches, which he gave before every rehearsal and which could take up to 30 minutes, he acted differently than in any private conversations with me. The rhetorical power resembled both a sermon and a pep talk and attracted the contestants' uninterrupted attention to him. His aim was clearly to raise people's enthusiasm for the project, but also to communicate his own positionality.

The Aza theatre and arts group is thus structured in a rather strict hierarchal manner. This is negotiated – and produced – by charisma, rhetorical skills and, on the side of the contestant, a strong sense for didactic authority and the context-specific use of names or titles. The group has at least two major goals: to create the ground for making a living out of art and music and to “make it” in the public sphere, inside and, if possible, outside Zambia. Mr. Mbewe's speeches were often addressing exactly this aspect of both individual and collective interest, as the following excerpt of a recorded speech shows:

So, the main goal really is, uh, Zollywood. And when I say that, it becomes easier for people to understand. This is a project, I, with my friends, should have started about three years ago in Lusaka. And it came from me, I brought it up. And we started doing the paperwork, but somehow, I got a job here and moved on, but my friends didn't go further. And then, last year, I said we have to start two things, a band, that started having shows here and there, and of course the Zollywood project. So, the Zollywood project is a big project. It's not a small project. People asking me questions last time how much I will be paying, I said nobody has money to pay anybody. We will make money to pay ourselves. What we have is the scope, or should I say the brains and the skills to make money.

03.02.2018, Mr. Mbewe during rehearsal, transcript

Why did Mr. Mbewe use the term “Zollywood” and not simply “Zambian movie industry”? Firstly, the term transports the feeling of success in the world's movie industries. From Hollywood to Bollywood and Nollywood – these national industries seem to carry a seal of quality. Secondly, the fact that there is a production industry evokes the hope for remuneration. In his speech, Mr. Mbewe, who was fully aware that Zollywood is nowhere close to these aspirations yet, did thus two things: he emphasised the lack of funds and instilled the hope for a fair pay on the condition of hard work. Hard work in and for itself is however not the only condition for financial stability. The group needs the Kansanshi Foundation's approval and goodwill to support their work; and the relationship between the CSR department and the musical director is key to that. It is also for this reason that members of the group accept Mr. Mbewe's authority. He is the gatekeeper to their success, and any conflict arising between Mr. Mbewe and a member would jeopardise his or her slowly forming social status.

As limited the CSR department's sponsorship was at the time of research, it nevertheless had a positive impact and was considered in every decision the group made. As for many other community projects, the Kansanshi Foundation is the biggest and only sponsor – simply because there is so little state support for arts and culture. The artists seeking a close bond with the mine has negative and positive consequences for their artistic status: on the one hand, they enter a relation of dependency; on the other hand,

they are regarded as privileged. It is for this double bind that Bourdieu calls the artist an “idiot of the bourgeois family” (Bourdieu 1993, 165). Despite the artist’s dependence on financial beneficiaries, producing music or art is regarded as a luxury in a sense of art for art’s sake. According to Bourdieu, artists will thus always hold on to powerful social classes or institutions in order to situate themselves in a realm of possible sponsors.

Artists in Solwezi, especially those working on their own, are faced with a variety of challenges which do not necessarily overlap with what I described for the Aza theatre and arts group. Here, I examined artists’ positionalities in an entangled field of economic necessities, artistic freedom and hierarchies in institutionalised music groups. Forging links with the Kansanshi Foundation and thus with a multinational corporation and its social outreach component, the Aza theatre and arts group hopes for the limelight in the music scene of Solwezi. The young actors and singers trust their fate in the hands of the charismatic director Mr. Mbewe, who, through his performance of rhetorical energy, speaks to their hopes of local success and international exposure.



Studio owner Emmanuel (in the middle) posing with two friends in front of his studio.

January 2018

Congolese musicians playing a concert for us in Meheba camp.

January 2018

Road towards home after rain.

January 2018

Photos: Anna Karsko





A farmer with cows
in Kabulamema,
Kabompo district.
January 2018

A bridge supposed
to connect Kimasala
and Mushitala; com-
missioned in 2016
but never finished.
February 2018

Conveyor belt at
Kansanshi mine.
February 2018
Photos: Anna-Sophie Hobi



(Extr)Activism, Governance and Power: A Short Account of Advocacy

Anna-Sophie Hobi

I rushed up the stairs which is easier said than done when each of the steps has a different height. I was late because someone held me up. By the time I had reached the entrance to the town clerk's (TC) office, Kutemba was already inside. I felt bad for having left my friend alone. I passed by a number of people lining up in the waiting room after registration with the secretary. A young lady was sitting behind her desk, preoccupied with her phone, and I asked her for permission to enter the TC's office. She nodded. I took a deep breath, knocked lightly at the door, took on a humble bodily posture and entered the large office. The TC was sitting upright in his chair behind his large fake wooden desk, shielded by stacked papers and folders, framed photographs and a Zambian flag. Above his head on the wall hung the obligatory portrait of the president of the Republic of Zambia. At the sight of the TC's office, his authority immediately becomes evident to anyone entering the room. He is the principle officer appointed by the Local Government Service Commission, the head of the municipal administration and chief executive of the council of Solwezi. I quickly took a seat next to my friend on the black couch, giving her an apologetic smile. Her eyes were fixated on her lap, while the TC was talking insistently on the meaning of council decision-making. He barely noticed my entering. In an intimidating manner, he asked Kutemba to explain to him what exactly a resolution was, instead of fully hearing her out on the reasons for our visit. I felt like a young girl, a school child being punished by a headmaster. Rounding up his lecture, he concluded in a harsh tone:

"The resolution cannot be implemented because it is a bad resolution! It is a bad resolution and it will not be implemented because all wards suffer the same. There has been no research to identify the communities. So, how can you give to some wards and not to others? And tax revenue is for all equally and not for specific areas. So, it has to go to all the wards the same. I appreciate that you are coming here, and it is your right and your job to follow up on this. But from a council perspective, it will not be implemented. Do you have any other questions?"

We asked whether it was not against the law to not implement a resolution.

"No, not a problem at all. Like the City Mall Bus Stop, accepted by the council but not implemented because people do not want it there. Because they say that thugs will be hanging around there. It is only a resolution and not a law by parliament. So, it is a local resolution and if it is difficult to implement, then it will not be implemented. In your case, there is this problem with the identification of communities. There are no guidelines on how to implement, so that is why we don't implement it and it has not been implemented the past three years."

What the TC did not know – because he did not let Kutemba finish her explanations – is that we came to deliver a policy brief on the resolution his council was refusing to put into effect. The brief had been written by her organisation.

My friend Kutemba works as a program's officer for the Solwezi-based youth organisation Youth Alliance for Development. They had been lobbying for a local mining revenue sharing mechanism for a number of years, which resulted in the successful passing of the so-called '10% resolution'. In December 2015, Solwezi Municipal Council (SMC) agreed that 10% of the revenue paid to SMC by mining companies in the district will be ploughed back to those communities most affected by their operations. However, the resolution had not been implemented.

Solwezi Municipal Council discussing the 10% resolution during the Ordinary Council Meeting on December 14, 2015. *Youth Alliance for Development, 2015*



Despite being well-prepared, it felt as if we were simply lucky: The exact two reasons he gave for not putting the resolution into practice were exactly the ones our policy brief addressed. Knowing that, we gained self-confidence and countered by explaining how communities were already identified through research and guidelines elaborated by a number of civil society organisations (CSOs). Kutemba handed him the policy brief, asserting that he will find the written answers inside. The conversation took a refreshing turn. Obviously surprised by the work of the local youth organisation, he asked us questions about the selected communities and the guidelines. The TC then glanced at the enclosed letter in which the youth organisation requested a response by the council and proceeded to browse through the policy brief. Kutemba gave me a relieved smile. The TC looked at us and promised to take up the matter in the next Development Committee Meeting and the subsequent Ordinary Council Meeting.

As a result of this and numerous other formal and informal conversations with officers and politicians, the 10% resolution was brought back on the table and eventually discussed in an Ordinary Council Meeting.¹ The described meeting with the town clerk was an important and a positive turnaround for the youth organisation's efforts to address a complex societal problem. With their work, they not only advocated for mining host communities which they think ought to be the immediate beneficiaries of such a revenue sharing mechanism. For the youth advocacy group, the resolution was also about the re-distribution of profits from resource extraction, an industry that has exacerbated certain inequalities in the area (Kesselring 2017, 98). The resolution itself is a political instrument to fight now prevalent economic and social inequalities.

In my research, I followed and attended a number of interactions between civil society activists and government authorities, but this visit at the town clerk's carries a special meaning to me. In the meeting, he expressed his authority through his rejecting stance. He believed our request to be irrelevant and not worth his time, and he generally seemed not to expect any valuable contribution from civil society. No longer was I just a mere observer of advocacy at play. At first, I felt not taken seriously and was intimidated by the TC's performed authority. As a result of that, the change of direction during the conversation and our winning his attention felt like a bigger success than it probably was. This experience contributed substantially to my understanding of the relationship between civil society and local government. It is not an equal playing field, though. A CSO has to prove its legitimacy to contribute to 'governance'². In the situation described above, the TC's attention first had to be won. We benefitted from the

- 1 After my fieldwork had ended in March 2018, the implementation of the mining revenue sharing mechanism commenced after a public debate. The council resolved to implement the resolution and to allocate the 10% of the mining revenue to the benefit of all wards within Solwezi district (SMC 2018b).
- 2 Civil society actors refer to governance as the 'governing by the state', meaning the managing of the nation's affairs by the political, economic and administrative authority (Diakonia 2013).

fact that we could show that we were one step ahead of his council; something which contributed to his willingness to eventually engage with us. The TC on the other hand is not isolated in his authority but is reliant upon the cooperation of both the council and its staff as well as the public: they might – also in reaction to advocacy efforts by civil society – put pressure on him by holding him accountable for the resolution’s implementation and the compliance with law. Many people know that, despite his negation, a resolution must be implemented (SMC 2018a). I was of course not surprised that the two groups of actors were not comparable players. While the local government – and civil society actors themselves – often speak of each other as “partners in development” (Meyns 2014, 65), the actual interaction between the two groups does not resemble a balanced partnership.

This account is one example that mirrors the realities of a Zambian civil society as described by Matildah Kaliba: “CSOs remain side-lined and undermined” (2015, 7). She further writes that CSOs “have to constantly negotiate for civic space” (2015, 7). Yet, CSOs cannot simply negotiate for their space as if they were equal trading partners, they have to struggle for civic space again and again (see Müller 2018). Including interactions with officials when studying civil society activists’ practices of governance can thus “open a fruitful window on actual practices, norms and actors ‘making’ governance” (Förster and Koechlin 2015, 3). Taking seriously such accounts of advocacy contributes to a nuanced understanding of how power relations shape civil society’s everyday work.



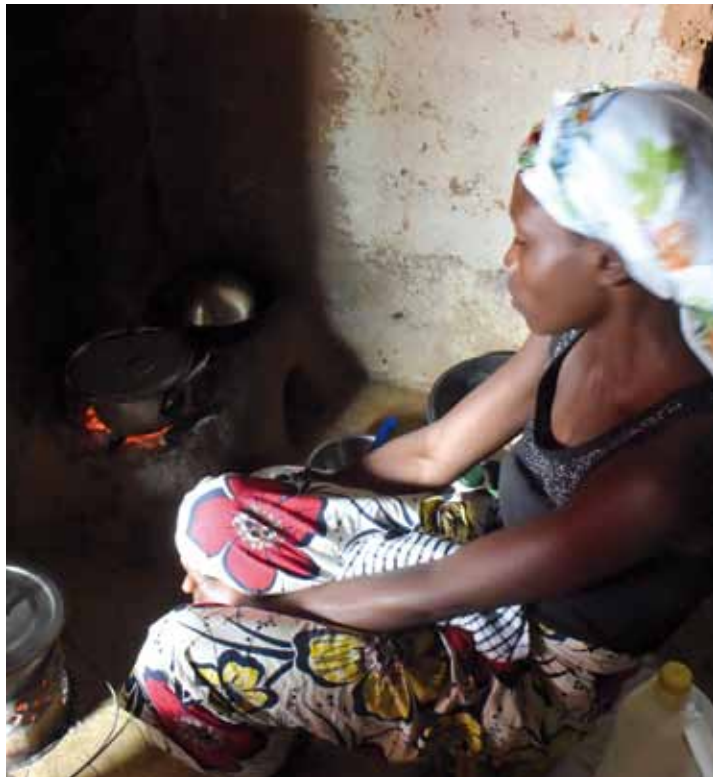
Youth at a community meeting in Kimasala wearing a t-shirt by YAD.
Anna-Sophie Hobi, August 2017



"Angolan Former Refugees": They used to be refugees but now gained citizenship of Zambia, in a suburb of Meheba.
February 2018

"Field note": on the train from Kapiri Mposhi to Dar es Salaam.
February 2018

"Cooking": this stove is the best way to cook with small amount of charcoals, Meheba.
February 2018
Photos: Misato Kimura



Part II

Methodology

Access, Power and Agency: Intersubjective Experiences of Refugees in the Meheba Refugee Settlement

Misato Kimura

I conducted ethnographic research, adopting an intersubjective approach,¹ on refugees who move between the Meheba refugee settlement and Solwezi town. My interest lay in the narratives that emerge from the experiences of leaving and entering the settlement and how the refugees perceive the divergent social situations they encounter as part of their limited mobility.

During my time in the settlement, I had many occasions to interact with the officers and workers from both the Zambian government and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) Solwezi. After shadowing the UNHCR workers for two days, I realised that the refugees saw me as a part of the organisation, leading me to rethink how to position myself. At the same time, I felt morally obliged to show respect towards the organisation and the government since I held a research permit from the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Zambian government, which was granted in Lusaka before I travelled to Solwezi. As a result of this dilemma, I became very pragmatic while doing my research, frequently shifting between refugees and workers in the settlement. I never stopped feeling a bit uneasy about it and continuously questioned where I actually belonged. My agency² was unconsciously limited as I negotiated the rules which came with accessibility to the settlement. I asked myself constantly if I could understand what the refugees experienced in their everyday lives if I remained too close to the workers.

I eventually realised that my uneasiness, my learning how to navigate between different groups of actors, and my limited agency were all things that I actually shared with the refugees, and these experiences gave me an entry point into their lifeworld. Refugees in Meheba go through similar experiences on a daily basis, in the sense that their agency is somehow invited into a certain pattern of action which I observed and experienced through my ethnography. As a result, I came to realise that ‘documents’ or ‘papers’ were central to everyone’s concerns and that the practices of handling them were solidly entrenched in Meheba.

1 Here, I refer to Kesselring (2015), a theory and methodology based on the mutual understanding and shared interaction of two or more people.

2 Here, I refer to the concept of “agency” embraced by Emirbayer and Mische (1998), in which agency is seen as the capability of acting and the ways in which people can act within the “temporal embedded process of social engagement” (1998, 962). Based on the experience of present and past, that capability influences the alternative future possibilities (Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

In what follows, I present two excerpts from my field diaries which look at the interrelations between documents, power³ and agency. I wrote them in Japanese, the language in which I can express my feelings best, and then translated them into English.

January 15 – In Maheba, there is a huge white tent surrounded by a high fence. It used to be the transit centre for newly arrived refugees but now it is used for a dojo for judo. Today I heard noise while walking nearby, so I stopped to see what people were doing. There were around twenty children practicing judo with two adults. There, I got to know Samuel, who was coaching the children in judo. Back home in Burundi, he used to work in an insurance company, then afterwards became a secretary in an opposition party. He was exiled from Burundi because...

January 22 – Today, I went there again because I was interested in hearing more stories involving what he told me last week about an experience he had in Solwezi. According to him, when he was selling merchandise in a shop in Solwezi, police officers showed up suddenly and asked him to show his ID and gate pass. He was arrested by the police for not having a valid gate pass and business certificate. They took him to a car, punched him many times and brought him to jail. He called Burundian friends in Solwezi to help him out, and, while the Burundian friends were collecting money for his release, he spent a week in a cell with only one meal. He was told to give up the shop in a court, but he told me “I will not give up the shop, because I don’t know how to do farming”. Slowly and carefully, he took from his pocket his recently renewed gate pass, which was folded into a pocket-sized rectangle and written out for ‘30 days’. As he did not have the transportation fee to Solwezi yet, he was waiting for remittance from somebody.

A gate pass is the permit which allows refugees to go outside of the refugee settlement.⁴ It contains the exact duration of the permitted stay outside of the Meheba refugee settlement and the purpose of the stay. The duration depends on an officer’s perspective of what the applicant wants to do. Thirty days seems to be a privilege and the longest duration that a refugee can obtain. Most of the time, they get only three days despite their requests for longer periods. I tried to understand why Samuel applied for his pass despite not having the fee to travel to Solwezi (a one-way transportation fee was 50 kwacha: around 5 Swiss francs at the time in January and February of 2018⁵), cutting into his time outside Meheba. Samuel queued for the gate pass despite his lack of funds because he was desperate to get out of the settlement. He was struggling to make a living, and, at the same time, he was trying to deal with the emotions associated with the traumatic experience he went through with the police. The gate pass gave him some agency even if he could not put it to use immediately.

This gate pass was kept carefully by a Congolese man.
Misato Kimura, February 2018



- 4 It applies mainly to Congolese and Burundians, as the so-called former refugees, the Angolans and Rwandans who were exiled as a result of the Angolan Civil Wars and Rwandan Genocide respectively, are in the process of obtaining residence permits and do not need to obtain gate passes.
- 5 In September 2018, the cost of transportation rose to 70 kwacha (7 Swiss francs) for one-way travel.

The documentation processes influence the refugees in different ways emotionally and economically while also shaping their agency, since queuing and waiting for and negotiating over the documents with different people dominates their daily lives. As James Scott (2009) points out, documentation is usually the result of institutions asserting their power and claims of legitimacy over people. In Meheba, the everyday activities of refugees, both in the settlement and outside, are essentially controlled by this ‘political space’ of documentation. During my field work, I also waited once for an officer in front of the office. I wrote in my field notes that “this morning I waited from 9:00 to 10:30. It was very tough to wait under the blazing sun. In Meheba, there are always many people waiting for various documents in front of the office”. In fact, one day prior to this experience, there were over fifty people queuing for gate passes, men and women waiting separately in two lines. There was a share-taxi waiting for passengers. Even though the taxi waited for over two hours, there was only a single passenger. An old Congolese man told me that he applied for the gate pass just to feel “freedom” in his body while holding the gate pass. In contrast, a second-generation Congolese young man told me that queuing for a gate pass would put emotional emphasis on him being a refugee, which makes him choose not to queue for one, but rather risk leaving the camp/settlement without one. For both of these men, despite their different thoughts, this paper dominated their emotions and daily activities in terms of what to do and how to act in both the Meheba Refugee settlement and Solwezi.

A great number of aspects in refugees’ lives are handled through documentation. Apart from gate passes, this also involves refugee certificates, residence permits, and school certificates. These legally required documents often served as an entry point for Zambian officials to get a grip on refugees. Particularly in Solwezi, police and immigration officers are on the lookout for refugees in the hopes of obtaining bribes from them.

The required documents play into refugees’ everyday decisions and structure their actions and also they are used as instruments of power exercised upon them. Their agency is limited by political restrictions, rumours, and interpretations of events which emerge while negotiating for the documentation. This fact reflects my initial application for access to the Meheba refugee settlement, during which I also interpreted events and acted in a certain way under my research permit from the Zambian government. Going through this process gave me access to aspects of people’s lives through the intersubjective experience. We are naturally shaped by our own experiences, and we can use them to reach out to those we are conducting research with.



A view of Meheba
Refugee Settlement.
*Misato Kimura, February
2018*



Small kiosk selling everyday goods and snacks.

January 2018

Aunt Douglas waiting in the yard of Bethel Evangelical Church under avocado trees for the bible study to start.

January 2018

Clouds on the horizon before the rains.

January 2018

Photos: Deborah Oliveira



Watching TV Together in Solwezi: A Reflection of Intimacy and Hierarchies of Knowledge in Ethnographic Research

Deborah Oliveira

“All the excitement, drama and passion. Everyday on Zee World. Extraordinary. Everyday”, says the trailer on our TV as we all get ready to watch the newest episode of our favorite soap opera, “Lies of the Heart”. All of us are keen to see what will happen – yesterday, we all kept our breath while we watched how the main character Urmi was supposed to marry her best friend who had been in love with her for ages and kept fighting to win her heart and her trust. But the wedding was endangered by Urmi's abusive ex-husband Samrat who conspired with the wicked future mother-in-law and staged a scandal that put Urmi's reputation at risk. Every episode for itself contained an astonishing amount of intrigues and unlikely twists and turns. Watching the five Bollywood soap operas that were broadcasted subsequently during the evening and are watched all over Zambia was a ritual we all shared while I stayed with my host family in Solwezi. Whenever we visited another friend or family member of Brenda's, my host mother, during the evening, we would watch a part of the episode together with the whole family at their house. Often, Brenda would groan during the most dramatic parts or exclaim “Oh, that Samrat!”. She would often shake her head at the new vicious plans he came up with, telling me and the other girls how he was not treating women right or how he was a bad person beyond redemption.



Clothes drying in the backyard.
Deborah Oliveira, January 2018

During one of my first afternoons at Brenda's home, Simon, her nephew, was sitting in front of the TV, peeling potatoes and preparing the vegetables for dinner when I joined him. He explained to me what had happened so far on the series and how the characters got into this tricky situation they were in. This particular soap opera called “Love Happens” negotiated class tensions within Indian society and the relation of tradition and

modernity. The drama evolved from the fact that a rich upper-class girl wanted to marry a farmer boy. Indian tradition apparently requires for the woman to move in with her future husband. Her materialistic and corrupt parents did not deem this appropriate for their daughter and suggested the couple lived with them in their big villa in the city. This offer was depicted as a great humiliation and affront towards the girl's in-laws. Although this culturally does not make any sense neither for Simon nor for me, we both felt and suffered with the rural and poor but – or even therefore, according to the soap opera – morally sincere in-laws. After the initial intuitive compassion, I realised that in fact I think critically of the underlying cultural norms, that I felt that any couple should be free to choose where to live, free from gendered expectations by their parents. But media has a way of story-telling that often is able to overcome cultural differences – Simon and I suffered with the girl's in-laws who were offended in their pride. Without even questioning the underlying set of values, the story instantly made sense to us. Both Simon and I have a different set of cultural logics than the originally intended Indian viewers, but we understood the story on a very emotional and affective level that did not require us to share its underlying cultural assumptions. Simon was as touched as I was and in taking sides with the groom, he upheld the importance of both romantic love and tradition and reiterated the insignificance of money and class. These ideals seem to fit into very different cultural contexts and make this narrative resonate with us. It was a simple good and bad dichotomy, and of course we were on the side of the good ones. We did not question whether the in-laws' feelings were legitimately hurt, but just compassionately related to the emotions of the characters, such as love, pride or shame.

At first when I was watching TV with my host family, I felt bad and thought I was wasting my time. I wanted to participate in their everyday lives and I was convinced that these evenings spent in front of the TV without a lot of talking would have no value

8-year-old Karen showing two guavas she just picked.
Deborah Oliveira, January 2018



for my research. Still during my stay I realised that watching TV actually was an important part of their daily lives and their family life as well and that participating in their evenings spent in front of the TV made me feel part of their family. The TV series in the evenings was when everybody came together and shared the sofa and the time of those episodes; it was a meaningful part of the day bringing everyone together and effortlessly creating a feeling of connectedness. The two youngest girls, Karen and Lusekelo, eight and seven years of age, loved to fall asleep among the other family members on the sofa to the sound of the TV, feeling sheltered by the community. With time, I came to understand how watching TV together was an important practice – I experienced several moments where watching TV series together and feeling the same or different affective reactions to them created the feeling of a shared intersubjectivity. This not only prompted me to think about our different lifeworlds that were the context against which we would relate to the images and stories on TV. Apart from an analytical value it had an immense emotional value to me, building connectedness with my host family and making me feel like I belonged.

This uneasiness I had first experienced while spending my time mostly in the household, watching TV in the evenings, also triggered a process of self-reflection and reflection of my disciplinary setting. It took me a long time after my field research to disentangle the guilty conscience I had felt spending most of my time in the intimate realm of the household. At the core of my uneasiness lies a problematic understanding of ethnography, which has been deconstructed by many critics since the debate about the crisis of representation in anthropology (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Rabinow 1977). But as this understanding of ethnography resonates with social hierarchies of knowledge and power, it still permeates through academic knowledge production. My guilty conscience was thus informed by a simplistic notion of culture as well as on a problematic division of the public versus the private realm. I felt like I was missing out on where culture would ‘happen’, not witnessing anything relevant to the traditionally central debates to anthropology. I felt like the intimacy of the household was only of interest to the academic debates if it made for a good empirical example to understand how a structure or the macro-level actually translated to the micro-level. My research interest felt marginal in two respects. On the one hand, my focus on the household traditionally was not at the centre of anthropological theory¹. On the other hand, my interest was not primarily in the local manifestation of larger social processes, but rather in intimate relationships themselves. Only with time did I realise that this thinking was informed by a dichotomy of the public versus the private that systematically devalues the supposedly private and intimate realm. This dichotomy aligns with a whole symbolic system of dichotomies that carry notions of femininity and masculinity. Feminist scholars have long deconstructed this division and demonstrated how the academic hierarchies of knowledge are infused by this devaluation of what has been long considered the feminine, private realm. A feminist ethnography not only aims to include the long neglected lifeworlds of women, but also challenges hierarchies of knowledge and questions the circumstances under which knowledge is produced. According to Shulamit Reinharz (1992), feminist research not only aims to understand gender within the context of lived experiences, but also challenges thinking about researcher subjectivity and the relationship between researcher and the researched. Fonow and Cook (1991) emphasise how feminist ethnography places special attention and concern towards the relational nature of research. A number of feminist scholars have embarked upon exploring the complexities of their relationships with their interlocutors and reflecting

1 For a discussion of the value of the household as an analytical category in the African context, see Guyer (1981). Compared to Guyer, I do not primarily explore the household as an economical entity, but rather as a site of intimate relationships and everyday practices.

upon their identities and positioning²: “Writing about and sharing how ethnographers experience their research and how ethnographers do their work – with all of the good and the bad – operate against naming the relational aspects of research as illogical or invalid and make visible the questions, complexities and processes of doing research.” (Pillow and Mayo 2007, 194). I would like to argue that meaningful and rich anthropological research needs to take intimate realms of everyday life seriously. Deep, thick data about people's lives emerge from intimate relationships that researchers and their interlocutors cultivate together. Anthropological knowledge production therefore is always collaborative and embedded in social relationships that should not be made invisible. Including relationships in ethnographic writing not only makes the process of producing knowledge more transparent and comprehensible, but social relationships in themselves have an epistemic value. Anthropological research requires the gentleness, patience and also the attentiveness towards topics that at first might seem irrelevant to one's own research interests or the academic debate because we as researchers are not free from culturally dominant hierarchies of knowledge and power.

2 For such feminist reflections about researcher subjectivity, positionality and relationships during research, see among others: Abu-Lughod (1992), Chaudry (2000), Delgado-Gaitain (1993), Kondo (1990), Trinh (1991), Villenas (1996), Visweswaran (1994).

The Social and Material: Relationships in Ethnographic Fieldwork

Aurel Everwijn

The relationship to the wood starts being formed when selecting it. When I went with Mubanga to the market to look for pinewood, we visited a number of different sellers and looked at each of their 20-30 planks by moving them from one pile to another, trying to find the ones we wanted. His expectations were clear: not too many knotholes and thick enough for planing. As I quickly learned, the singularity of each plank was very noticeable while working on them. To plane a piece of wood I really had to get a feeling for its quality, its traits and its structure. I had to look at it and find the direction of the fibers which give the direction in which the plank has to be planed. Many times the fibers ran in different directions on the right and left half of the same side of the plank. Additionally, the knotholes require special attention and would most often disrupt the momentum of the plane which should be shoved along the plank in a smooth but forceful movement. While in other carpentry tasks I felt quite confident and proficient after a couple of weeks, planing a plank was definitely not one of them. I was always impressed by the smooth movements with which Mubanga would plane even the most stubborn plank, producing long, beautifully curled wood shavings. He could even rescue a plank, which I had already completely given up since I only chipped off, split and messed up the surface around a knothole. I could see how well Mubanga knew the wood. His fingers would glide along the edges and surfaces sensing any irregularities, his eyes would check out the straightness of the whole plank or beam, and his whole body adjusted to the type, quality and condition of the piece of wood he had in front of him. Wet or more resinous wood required a totally different approach when sawing or planing it than dry or hardwood which could be very susceptible to splitting and breaking.

With this vignette which I wrote one evening during my field research in Solwezi, I want to reflect on how our relationships in the ethnographic field influence our research experience. The role of relationships in ethnographic research and especially the different ways in which work is building relationships is something that became an important topic for me when reflecting on my time working together with Mubanga, a carpenter in Solwezi, Zambia. One can explore the building of relationships at different levels: the interpersonal relationships between individuals or within a group, the



Kafula using a plane blade as chisel.
Aurel Everwijn February 2018

relationships between the individual and the wider society, and the relationship between humans and their material/natural environment. Through work and with the help of the ethnographic method of participant observation, I have developed relationships on each of those levels. The characteristics of these relationships have influenced nearly everything about my research. They have influenced how I perceived the social environment, what I have learned about the craft of carpentry, what I have learned about the different materials and tools in use, how I perceived myself, and how my views of what work is have changed.

When looking at the relationships with my physical environment as an apprentice carpenter, the tools and the different types of wood stand out. I learned some things about them through what Mubanga told me, but this articulated knowledge was limited. Mubanga could for example provide me with the information that pinewood is lighter, easier to work with, cheaper and less durable than mukwa wood. However the bulk of his knowledge that was expressed in the way he worked with it and the ways in which he adjusted his every motion to the specific piece of wood he was working with, remained in the realm of the unarticulated knowledge which cannot easily be put into words. To access this tacit knowledge, I needed to develop my own relationship with the wood which could in turn also help me to better understand Mubanga's relationship with it.

Now – how do we go about developing a relationship with a piece of wood? In my eyes, as problematic as this may sound, we can certainly draw a lot of parallels between interpersonal relationships and relationships between humans and “things”. Both sides enter a mutual exchange, both sides should “listen” to the other and be open towards him/her/it without any prejudices. They should develop a relationship which the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber calls an “*Ich – Du*” relationship, one that closes the distance of an “*Ich – Es*” relationship (cf. Buber 1983: 3ff). In practice this meant to get into what could be called – following Gerd Spittler's “*dichte Teilnahme*” (2001, 19)

Busy times: Kafula working on a bed-post next to three beds and a table which are nearly completed.

Aurel Everwijn February 2018



– “deep conversation” with the piece of wood I had in front of me. It was important to find the right balance between realising my own ideas of what I wanted to create out of the specific piece of wood and “listening” to what the wood was telling me. Planing can show this in a very straightforward way: When you don’t adjust your movements and way of working to the specific plank in front of you, it will splinter and resist what you are doing. When you get angry and try to force it to obey your will, it will get even worse and end up as waste in extreme cases. Only the attentive and meditative focus on the wood and its many special traits will bring the best results. Sometimes, this means to accept small imperfections around a knothole.

What a simple wood plank can tell us really depends on how we approach it. Already the simple physical appearance of the plank is able to express a lot of the history of its existence (the structure of its fibers, the annual rings, the dryness, the smell and the marks of the sawblade which cut them, etc.). The visual features also let us draw conclusions about the geological condition of the land the tree grew on, the tree’s age, the annual weather conditions, how it was stored and cut. Beyond these physical characteristics of a plank which can still be quite easily categorised, counted or conceptualised, there are other aspects which, following Tim Ingold, are neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined. Ingold says that

“[...] the properties of materials, regarded as constituents of an environment, cannot be identified as fixed, essential attributes of things, but are rather processual and relational. They are neither objectively determined nor subjectively imagined but practically experienced. In that sense, every property is a condensed story. To describe the properties of materials is to tell the stories of what happens to them as they flow, mix and mutate” (Ingold 2007, 14).

This approach to “the properties of materials” through “practically experiencing” their “processual and relational” nature is in my eyes only possible through developing a deep relationship with them, requiring time and commitment. When we are able to develop such a relationship, be it to an object or a person, we may experience new aspects of their reality which have previously escaped our inquiries. When I reflected on how Mubanga looked at the wood we were working with this became very clear to me. He often saw much more potential in a piece of wood than I did. He knew about the many tacit qualities that it held and he knew how to carve out this potential. Many planks we bought got moldy very quickly (not least due to the humidity in the rainy season at the time of research) and took on a green-gray color. I tended to look at them as inferior and deny them their ability to still become part of a beautiful piece of furniture. Mubanga however seemed to look right past these outer characteristics as if they were not there. For him the plank still represented all the potential he knew was in it. The same was true for other things like bent nails, old beams full of wormholes or small offcuts of which many would only think of as waste. I believe that through his relationship with the wood he has gained a much deeper understanding of the complexity of its nature.

In her book *The Ethnographic Self*, Amanda Coffey wrote that

“[f]ieldwork simply won’t generate any good data and interesting analysis without personal investment into the relations of the field” (1999, 39f.).

Now this might seem trivial but I think it is nevertheless important to reflect upon the role of relationships in the process of conducting field research. We as humans stand in a constant relationship with our social and material/natural environment. We define ourselves through them. Our world is constructed through the relationships we have with the people and things around us from early childhood on (cf. Berger and

Luckmann 1980, 21ff.). This also means that the world we present as a researcher in our publications is a product of our relationships with everything we came into contact with in the course of our research (and before). I claim that the quality of the outcome of our research is directly linked to the attention we give to our relationships in the field. At this point I don't want to differentiate between relationships that are interpersonal or relationships that unfold between humans and their material/natural environment. However different they might seem, they both share a set of qualities which can help us greatly to grasp more of the complex social and material reality we encounter in the field. It doesn't matter if we are an anthropologist, zoologist or geologist, our descriptions will always mirror how we saw the other in relation to us and how we experienced the other in the relationship with us.



The open structure of the workshop.
February 2018

Mubanga practicing the art of planing a plank.
February 2018

Kafula heading off to deliver a bed to a customer.
January 2018
Photos: Aurel Everwijn





Alice Springs town centre.
February 2018

Sunset in the desert.
February 2018

Painting display at the gallery.
February 2018
Photos: Michèle Monnier



Gaining First Ethnographic Experiences: Aboriginal Art Production in Alice Springs, Australia

Michèle Monnier

I conducted fieldwork during a six and a half week stay in Alice Springs, Australia. Alice Springs, being located in the centre of Australia surrounded by a vast desert, is known as the centre of Aboriginal art. Most of my research took place at Mbantua Aboriginal art gallery, where I talked to Aboriginal artists and staff members on a daily basis who shared their knowledge with me.

My interaction with Aboriginal artists improved over the course of the six weeks as I became aware of social conventions in a unique place with complex social relations between the Aboriginal Australian and white Australian population, with different discourse systems and ways of interacting. The art that is produced around Alice Springs can only be fully understood by relating it to the surrounding landscape. Aboriginal artists are inspired by the landscape they grew up in, as many stories told by the elders connect the land with the creation myths of ancestral spirits that formed the world during the 'dreaming'. Traditionally "paintings are part of a clan's ancestral heritage" (Morphy 1991, 21). Not all the knowledge is painted in a way that it is completely accessible to the outside person. By participating and observing daily activities at the gallery, I learned to interact with the local Aboriginal artists and began to enter their world.

During my research in Alice Springs, I was also able to visit two Aboriginal artists at the gallery's warehouse. The warehouse provides a place for the artists to work at. Most of the artists live in remote areas in the desert and come to Alice Springs once or twice a month. Up until this day, I only had the chance to talk to artists about their work. Now I was able to witness how their paintings come to life. I struggled to communicate with the artists at first. The following description mostly consists of my field notes, aiming to show how the situation changed over the hours I had been there. Sitting on the floor with two elderly ladies, Gloria and Betty, for four hours watching every move of their paintbrushes sharpened my senses. Over the course of the morning,



Betty sorting her
paint pots, Alice
Springs.
*Michèle Monnier, January
2018*

both artists opened up to me. The growing understanding between me, the student of anthropology coming from the outside, and the two artists showed itself through body language, gazes, hand movements and in conversation.

After about 20 minutes, I asked Gloria, “Are your sisters painting too?”. I expected to get ‘yes’ as an answer as I was told that she came from an artistic family. She answered, “Which sister?” expecting me to name one, because most of her sisters paint as well. I did not expect this answer and had to smile. It was the first time that she reacted to one of my questions and answered me looking into my face. While it was not the answer I had expected, it worked as an ice-breaker.

Later on, Gloria began to sing while painting. I saw it as a sign that she was comfortable having me around. She started humming a melody and later began singing it aloud. She kept on singing for a long time, so long that the melody almost turned into background music, creating a powerful and concentrated ambience. Her soft singing filled the room, the repetitive melodies accompanying every brush stroke. The atmosphere was very special. The singing gave the whole activity a different, more meaningful setting, which made me feel how their culture still is very alive. The singing connected the artist with the painting. Gloria did her leaf design by putting a thick brush into two different colour pots, mixing the two colours and then making a big stroke on the canvas. The thick strokes were layered and created something that looked like multiple leaves on a pile. She did not wash the brush when changing colours, which resulted in the mixture of many colours, creating a new look. You could see how she was thinking about her colour choice every time she dipped her brush into a new colour and how she thought about the placement of the next stroke.

After sitting on the concrete floor for one hour, my leg started to feel numb and I had to shift positions. It was the first time that I had done participant observation and felt with my body how the people feel. Both women seemed to be comfortable sitting in this position for a long while. Gloria looked at me after speaking to Betty, smiled and said, “story”, pointing at her painting. I was surprised because this was the first time Gloria started a conversation with me. I could feel that she felt more comfortable after having me around for an hour. Gloria then looked at me, pointed to the canvas with the left hand as she was still painting with her right hand, saying, “My grandfather’s country!” She waited until I nodded to see that I could follow her. She continued, “Song, my grandfather sang to me. Song for leaves, medicine leaves. Grow in my grandfather’s country” and started singing the first part of the song again to remind me of it. This is how I learned that her grandfather had taught her the song she had been singing the past hour. The song is about making bush medicine out of the leaves that she is painting. It took more than two hours to be taught the meaning of her song she’s been singing the whole morning. Moments later, Gloria looked at me and said, “I was in London! Europe! All over!” and made a hand gesture showing a big journey. I did not ask her anything; she just started talking to me at random. I felt surprised and honoured that she actually wanted to tell me something without me initiating the conversation. You could feel that she was proud about her success and that people all over the world like her art. (field notes 18.01.2018).

Over the course of one morning, we were able to establish a relationship that started in silence and developed into a state where the artists actively wanted to tell me, the observer, about their art. In the beginning, while I observed Gloria and Betty, they both observed me as well as they looked at each other when I was writing down notes, probably wondering whether what they did was worth noting down. After two hours, however, we talked to each other, something I had never expected. I felt accepted. This morning showed me that anthropology needs time, trust and closeness. While many artists paint in order to make money, the morning I spent with those two ladies showed me that it has another side to it: art matters to the individual. I was surprised by the strong personal connection they had to their motifs, painting their mother’s and grandfather’s stories. Both Betty and Gloria want to paint the stories of their ancestors to pass on their knowledge and to remember their roots.

This day included so many little things. From sitting on the floor for four hours, having your legs hurt, sitting together in silence, sharing a laugh, looking at the move-



Aboriginal artists
Gloria painting her
leaf design, Alice
Springs.
*Michèle Monnier, January
2018*

ment of the brush being dipped into different colours and creating a combination of new colours, bringing paint and washing brushes to exchanging looks with the artists. I learnt that one should not be discouraged by silence and a denied answer, as the answer per se is not denied but postponed or given to an intermediate person.

Through her singing and short explanations, Gloria expressed her connection to land and her story that is then put into her art. Aboriginal art and Aboriginal artists cannot be looked at in isolation. Instead, the social surrounding, relationships to nature and landscape and ancestral connections shape Aboriginal artists. This cosmos of Aboriginal knowledge is shared in their artwork. Once you get an insight into the world of the artists, you perceive Aboriginal art on a different level. It is only interaction that gives one access to the artists and the story behind a painting. While certain symbols can be understood when looking at it from an outside perspective, other meanings only become visible once you interact with the artists as they share their views of the symbols and motives used. Successful interaction and communication, something I became aware of during my time in the field, requires intuition, sensitivity and awareness of contextual conversation styles, such as use of words and silence, hand gestures and looks. In the environment I conducted my research, the Aboriginal contextual conversation styles, in some instances, differed from the white Australian discourse system, being more physical and using less phonological elements. As my time in the field was limited to six weeks, I was only able to establish contact to a small group of artists. In further research, it would be interesting to build a closer relationship to the artists and engage in conversations about multiple forms of their artworks. During my visit, I had the chance to hear the story and meaning behind one of Gloria's paintings. But there are

so many more stories to be told. However, this first research experience was rewarding, both on a personal and on an ethnographical level.

Ethnography can only work with sensitivity to such ways of interaction as described above, which can then serve as the basis for accessing ethnographic knowledge. This process needs time and experience. Moreover, ethnography completely relies on the information given by the interlocutors themselves. What the Aboriginal artists share is a much more direct representation of the importance of their knowledge and experience than information given by others. While anthropology can be taught to a certain extent, experiencing research on your own by immersing yourself in a new surrounding and getting an insight into other peoples' lives is more rewarding. Experiencing the social environment opens up a new perspective of perceiving the culture and people of your research area and enables you to think further, making anthropology even more fascinating and inspiring.

Epilogue: What Makes a Good Vignette?

Anna Christen

How to present social change in writing? In this issue, nine contributors have crafted vignettes as a way to depict and offer context-sensitive interpretations of the social world in Solwezi. Each vignette can be conceived as a portrait made with a perspective view, seen through the lens of its author's individual set of questions as well as his or her own professional and personal background. By using vignettes to emphasise carefully selected aspects of their fieldwork experience, the here gathered contributors offer interpretative openings into the lifeworld, knowledge and everyday practices of people in Solwezi town. In that, each vignette sheds light on particular aspects of life, but also contributes to a refined understanding of the ethnographic method more generally.

Let me here, rather than terminating the discussion, add to it by sharing a brief glance into etymological origins of the notion “vignette” in and around anthropology: Originating in the French diminutive of *vigne*, vignette means “small vine”. The term dates back to the 13th century, but its wider application only began around the 1750s, when variations of grapevine tendrils, branches and leaves were applied as decorative elements for period furniture, wall carvings, wine etiquettes and later, in the mid 19th century, also for book illustrations in offset printing. In present times, illustrations of little vines still adorn newer print works and furniture pieces, but the vignette has received a broadened notion and ambit. Today, vignettes pop up as a digital filter choice to blur the edges of our smart phone photos, or are stuck to car windshields, as proof of payment for road charges in Switzerland. They have also found entrance in the world of prose, where they embody short, impressionistic pieces of writing that typically focuses on a moment or a person. Over time, the vignette has become more and more self-evidently embedded in ethnographies, where it has earned the status of a picture to be idiosyncratically interpreted rather than a theory to be univocally understood.

Now, let me use this idea of writing as a picture as a springboard for a brief, theoretical reflection that also bears significance for the history of how language was framed within the humanities and social sciences: In 1921, Ludwig Wittgenstein published the only book of his lifetime, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (TLP in following). The treatise introduces the idea of a particular kind of fact: a fact as a picture, or representation, of another fact. The underlying hypothesis suggests that if we understand how pictures represent the world, we can also understand how representation in general is possible.

What can this tell us about the creative capacity of vignettes? Well, the TLP proposes that a picture can be an actual drawing or a photograph, a signpost or a sound wave: “A gramophone record, the musical idea, the written notes, and the sound-waves, all stand to one another in the same internal relation of depicting that holds between language and the world [...]” (1921, 4.014). Accordingly, a picture can also be a word. To picture something, then, is understood as a relation which may reach out in two ways: from language to the world and from the world onto language.

This insight, which for us today might seem trivial, sparked a larger discussion and a wide range of publications on language and its relation to meaning and reference. The theoretical connection between things in the world (in the language of TLP: states of affairs) and their illustration with words became center stage to a broad scholastic discussion that became known as the “linguistic turn”. The idea of a tight connection between words and what subjects seek to depict with them laid the foundation for a focused, interdisciplinary study of language, its capabilities and shortcomings concerning an accurate depiction of the world.

Wittgenstein's picture theory of language helps us to see the potential of vignettes by considering words as pictures. As stylistic devices, they draw the reader's attention

to the significance of a moment, allowing the mind to linger, grasp, and gauge. However, vignettes are not only useful in the sense that they give us a break from theory. Rather, they allow certain problems, issues, questions and states of affairs to show themselves rather than be said. Harking back to the meaning a vignette conveys in the fine arts, we can see that its form transports its content that could not be shown by means of theoretical writing. As João Biehl has noted, vignettes in particular, and ethnographic writing in general “can push the limits of language and imagination as it seeks to bear witness to living in a manner that does not bound, reduce, or make caricatures of people but liberates, if always only partially, some of the epistemological force and authority of their travails and stories that might break open alternative styles of reasoning” (2013, 587). With Wittgenstein, we could say that a good vignette incorporates a series of propositional signs which share the form with the fact they represent. Another way to put this is to say that a good vignette evokes meaning through imagery.

Vignettes portray selected aspects of life, and their view is always partial. What makes a good vignette, then? Michael Jackson has suggested that “sound ethnographic writing often involves a resistance to closure, a resolve to suggest meaning rather than spell it out” (2017, 59). Ideally, then, vignettes ask questions rather than answering them. Noting that, this issue has invited you, the reader, to immerse yourself in the reading experience of each vignette, and critically follow their offered interpretation. However, the affective properties of writing may have stimulated alternative interpretations of the vignettes presented. This edition thus also encourages you to wonder, disagree, and press ahead with your own perspective on the here presented lifeworlds. Perhaps they have inspired you to raise novel points, and to think ahead.

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