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The Emic Evaluation Approach – Epistemologies, Experience, and Ethnographic Practice

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Table of Contents

Frontpage:
Observing the Sakaraboutou festival in the city of Bondoukou (Côte d'Ivoire 1997)
Photo: Kofi Michel Kouakou

Page	Author/Title
	Till Förster:
	Emic Evaluation Approach –
3	Some Remarks on its Epistemological Background
3	▪ A Personal Retrospection
5	▪ Participation and Observation
7	▪ Towards the Emic Evaluation Approach (EEA)
8	*1) A Mapping of the Social Actors*
	2) Social Discourse Analysis
	3) Practice Analysis
9	▪ Appresentation and Simultaneity
	The EEA – Experiences And Reflections from
13	Current Research
	Barbara Heer:
	EEA, Public Space and the Unruliness of the
15	Analysis of Practice
15	▪ Introduction
16	▪ Adoption of the EEA to the Analysis of Public Spaces
16	*1) The Mapping of the Public Space*
	2) Practice Analysis
17	*3) Social Discourse Analysis*
17	▪ The Unruliness of the Analysis of Practice
19	▪ Concluding Remarks
	Michelle Engeler:
	Listening, Experiencing, Observing – Reflections
20	On Doing Fieldwork
20	▪ Introduction
21	*Listening*
	Sharing Experiences
22	*Observing Practices*
23	▪ Concluding Remarks
	Andrea Kaufmann:
25	The EEA in an Urban, Post-Conflict Setting
25	▪ Introduction
25	▪ Shared Experiences in the Urban Context
26	▪ Understanding Security and Insecurity
27	▪ Conceiving the Social Setting and Its Tensions
29	▪ Concluding Remarks

Table of Contents

Kerstin Bauer:
30 The EEA in Rapidly Changing (Post-)Conflict Settings
- 30 Introduction
- 30 Mapping and Practice Analysis in a Conflict-Affected Field Site
- 32 Challenges and Constraints
- 33 Concluding Remarks

Kathrin Heitz:
34 Revealing Subtleties – The EEA in the Study of Power, Security and Trust
- 34 Introduction
- 34 Insights Gained from Divergences between Discourse and Practice Analysis
- 35 Grasping Subtleties in a Field of Power: A Case for Participation
  - *35 Sharing Human Experience: Living in Common*
  - *36 Participation: Experience Generated New Insight*
- 38 Concluding Remarks

Till Förster:
39 Coda – Participation and Experience as Ethnographic Practice

44 References

Emic Evaluation Approach – Some Remarks on its Epistemological Background

Till Förster

Introduction

This collection of short essays is the result of a collaborative effort to address methodological questions that arose in two research groups at the Institute of Social Anthropology in Basel. The two groups work on different themes: visual culture and political transformations. Many of the questions that arose during fieldwork, however, resembled each other and led to similar answers. The following assemblage of personal reports reflects how the researchers, mostly PhD candidates, conducted fieldwork in different places, what problems they encountered and how they addressed them empirically and analytically. Though the topics of the individual research projects diverged significantly, the answers seemed to converge on a few points, namely the interplay and juxtaposition of different methods and the role of the researcher as participant. The two groups took this as an occasion to reflect more thoroughly about the methodological framework of their research. Consequently, each of their vignettes is dedicated to a methodological question that surfaced when conducting fieldwork and how the researchers attempted to answer it.

A more general perspective is elaborated in this introductory essay, which addresses the epistemological background of what is usually called participant observation in anthropology. These remarks grew largely out of my own, personal reflections on ethnographic fieldwork but were elaborated through the discussions in the research groups. In 2007, they had led to the elaboration of the Emic Evaluation Approach (EEA). It was adopted as guiding methodology by several research projects in the two groups. As a theoretically informed approach, the EEA wanted to overcome the one-dimensional conception of 'the' emic perspective by incorporating the full range of how actors relate to each other in social life. Like the other contributors to this collection, I do not distinguish between method and theory, assuming that the two intrinsically build on each other. Consequently, I bring methodological and theoretical reflections together and for the same reason do not distinguish neatly between method and analysis. My aim is to develop a more thoroughly reflected approach to the understanding of social reality and to stimulate a debate about anthropology's claim that participant observation provides a privileged access to social reality.

A Personal Retrospection

While working on the arts of Africa through the 1980s and 1990s, I was increasingly dissatisfied with how it was studied by art historians and anthropologists.[1] While art historians always put the object first and tried to deduce meaning from its form, anth-

1 Having been trained as an art historian and as an anthropologist, I understood the study of African art as an interdisciplinary field and tried to profit from the heritage of both disciplines as best as I could.

ropologists usually claimed that it was much more important to look at the people who had created the object and later used it in a variety of social practices. Both perspectives had obvious strong and weak points: On the one hand, the object-centred perspective of art historians allowed them to re-construct continuities of style and genre beyond the time horizon that anthropologists were usually able to cover. They were also able to attribute authorship of specific objects to individual artists or more often workshops, where anthropologists simply might not get any answers. On the other hand, the practice-centred perspective of anthropological enquiry had led to a body of knowledge about rites and ceremonies in which the artworks were used and through which they received meaning. Anthropologists provided the emic knowledge that gave meaning to the objects, for instance their role as agents and mediators of basic cultural convictions. Much of African art studies at the time was about how art works were embedded in the reproduction of culture.

1983: The author as a young man with Eberhard Fischer in northern Côte d'Ivoire.
Photo: Lorenz Homberger

However, the two perspectives were rarely combined. More often than not, both art historians and anthropologists insisted on the superiority of their own, disciplinary approach. While the art historians accused the anthropologists – often rightly so – of not really looking at the art works, the anthropologists responded by saying that art historians had little knowledge about what these objects really meant to the people in Africa.[2]

Unfortunately, this led to several blind spots in the study of art in Africa. One was that both art historians and social anthropologists denied the uneven distribution of knowledge about art and aesthetics in almost all societies. The fact that many people in Africa were not able to answer questions about how they perceived things of their lifeworld was misinterpreted by both sides: While the art historians claimed that this testified to the superiority of their own, object-centred approach – "to let the art work speak" –, anthropologists often claimed the contrary, namely that the art historians' approach was irrelevant to the understanding of material objects in other societies than the West: "because material objects don't speak – only human beings speak." They claimed that an object-centred approach would only make sense where art had become autonomous, i.e. in truly modern societies that had developed a similar attitude towards such works.

To bring the two perspectives together was a methodological interest of mine since I had started to conduct fieldwork as a student. The polemics largely prevented a more thorough debate of what these apparently disciplinary differences actually were about: there were two epistemologies building on different basic assumptions, leading to two distinct methodologies. Their juxtaposition, however, was more due to the arti-

2 The debate became fierce in the museum context where the design of exhibitions was largely affected by the understanding of what these material objects were about. In the 1990s, the dispute sometimes escalated into vilifying statements about the other's perspective.

culation of the two disciplines in the academic landscape and less to their incompatibility. In fact, they hinted at two different aspects of the object of study, in this case art. They were complementary – not mutually exclusive.

Participation and Observation

A similar, but more general misunderstanding, subsists with regard to what was then and to large extent still is called the core of anthropology: participant observation. When conducting field research in Nafoun, a rural village in northern Côte d'Ivoire, through the 1980s and 1990s, I adopted the usual breadth of anthropological methods, starting with interviews combined with participant observation and a little survey research. Interviews had the obvious advantage that they allowed me to collect a lot of data within a short time, mostly within an hour or less.[3] But after half a year, I increasingly became aware of the performative character of interviews. They were front stage performances to the white ethnographer who, many believed, must have had a hidden agenda for staying in a place like Nafoun. Almost all of my interlocutors were illiterate and had no idea what a university or research is. They doubted that somebody would settle down in a Senufo village "just to learn how they lived". Many suspected that my stay must have been about something else. They had had some experience with censuses of the colonial administration to establish a record for the levying of head taxes, and later, they had become familiar with surveys of development agencies – both were understood as driven by the will to dominate them (in general Ferguson 1990). Unsurprisingly, interviews and other inquiries did not have a good reputation, and in particular the heads of compounds were reluctant to reveal how they actually thought about their place in the world. Later, when we had become familiar with each other, the old men told me that they had been very suspicious about me when I first came in 1979.

Conducting an interview in such a setting meant to introduce a hierarchy, to some extent a colonial hierarchy, in the relationship between them and me. What I had heard in the first months of long-term fieldwork was heavily filtered. When learning the local language, I increasingly became aware of idiomatic sentences that often framed the interviews. Many started with a remark as "I will answer" or "I have heard" and ended with sentences as "this is like this" or "this is it". The statements were meant to be valid in another context, the context of statehood and domination. They were meant to secure – or produce – a space where they could retain their own agency and escape the attempts to dominate them through what was usually called "white man's magic", i.e. paperwork. Some of my neighbours were quite good at it, and many encounters between them and official representatives of the state or of development agencies later became subjects of jokes and village talk. In particular the statement *mì n dì lɔ́'ɔ̀*, literally "I have heard", was falsely translated as *j'ai compris* into French. Many a development expert believed that they, the peasants would actually do what he had told them to do. It made the villagers grin to see how angry these wealthy men in their air-conditioned cars became when they had to realise that nothing was done. I had similar feelings when re-reading my first interviews after a few months. There was a huge gap between oral information and daily practice.

Of course, it is banal to state that human beings do not always perform as they say they would. And it would also be too easy to attribute the gap only to the fact that the Senufo had been an acephalous society in pre-colonial times and did not appreciate the obscene disparities between rich and poor in the post-colony. At the time, there was

3 All interviews were conducted in the vernacular language because there were but two young men speaking French in the village at the time. One of them served as interpreter as long as I wasn't able to communicate myself.

a growing body of literature on this and related topics. In particular the work of James Scott influenced my understanding of what happened in front of my eyes in Nafoun.[4] But there was more to it than the intention to resist attempts of domination.

I thought that I would learn more by focusing on situations where the peasants were engaging in collective actions, in particular when they were labouring their fields. To my surprise, however, there was not much communication on the most important work that a peasant can engage in. What was an issue was the distribution of labourers on the different fields. This was negotiated and fixed either a week in advance or sometimes even from one day to the other (the Senufo have a six-day week with alternating days of hard work and rest or light work). But they seldom spoke a word when they were actually working. When inquiring about how they performed, I had not received any illuminative answer. I also did not get any useful information from the craftsmen who, I thought, must have a refined vocabulary about their art (Förster in print). In both fields, however, the actors just spoke about larger contexts of practice, for instance "sowing" or "hoeing", while the vocabulary of the highly specialised sculptors was even more limited. Almost everything, I was told, was "sculpting" or, even more general, just "work". I was deceived and believed that they simply did not want to speak to me as they had refused to speak to others coming from afar.

There were, however, occasions when everybody talked about fieldwork, in particular the big "friendship hoeing" that was organised in September to clear new fields. But daily talk was not about how the hoeing was performed – it was about who would eventually win the contest and how attractive this man would then be to the girls. The actual coordination of dozens young men in the field was embedded in their bodily routines. It was performed silently. Observation was obviously the means through which I would get access, I thought. My attention was drawn to their performance as a collective act – but it remained based on what I knew already about them and their work. What was more important in an ethnographic attitude was, however, the point when awareness arises, i.e. when the ethnographer's attention is slowly or suddenly drawn to something new – not new as an element of the natural lifeworld of the others but new to the ethnographer.

The experience of daily life led me to distinguish between observation and participation. Let me say a few words on the first before examining more deeply the character of the latter. Observation is an intentional act that is preceded by an already existing awareness, a focus on what one wants to observe (Förster 2001). Seeing is unfocused and hence more open. The two as a couple stand for a gradient, a sliding scale of awareness. What the ethnographer then needs to do is to take his own shifting perception, the emergence of attention, as an instrument to literally 'dis-cover' where his understanding of taken-for-granted acts and things differs from that of others (Waldenfels 1997, 1999, 2004). In the 1980s and 1990s, this attitude towards one's own sensory experience as heuristic instrument responded to a relatively new strand of anthropological reflection on how ethnographers relate to the world and how their attitudes to the world shift due to their participation in another lifeworld. These reflections neither led to the formation of a 'school' nor were they fashionable in the academic landscape. There were only few scholars who actively contributed to the discussion, in particular David Howes from the University of Toronto and his (former) students (Howes 1991, 2005; Classen 1993). Paul Stoller's books about his apprenticeship as a sorcerer among the Songhay of Niger showed how his sensory perception changed in the process of sedimentation of lifeworldly perceptions different from his (Stoller 1987, 1989, 1997). The central thesis

4 His first book on the "Moral Economy of the Peasant" (Scott 1976) was already available when I started to do fieldwork, his later books were published during the years of my later fieldwork and when I was a development expert myself (Scott 1985, 1990).

of this research strand claimed that living another lifeworld inevitably meant to adapt one's own senses – and in extension indeed the body – to that of the others (e.g. Synnott 1993). The pre-condition is that the ethnographer actually participates in the social practices of others. There is no way to access this other lifeworldly reality through language or by mere observation.

In 2001, two closely related articles were published on the topic (Spittler 2001, Förster 2001). Both argued that much of the lifeworld of others was not accessible through interviews and similar methods, let alone survey research. The two claimed that only participation would provide such insights, but the two articles did not address the epistemological foundations of the obvious difference between participation and other modes of becoming aware of other lifeworldly realities. It was clear, however, that participation and observation are two different methods that generate different kinds of data. They were falsely lumped together under the amorphous cover term of participant observation.

These preliminary reflections met another strand of thinking that was informed by phenomenology and more precisely by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "Phenomenology of Perception" (Merleau-Ponty 1945). Phenomenology did not and still does not belong to mainstream anthropology. There were only a few ethnographies indebted to that thread of social philosophy.[5] Somewhat seminal was the work of Michael Jackson, who had conducted fieldwork among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone during peaceful times and after the civil war that rocked the country between 1991 and 2002. Like the group around Howes, and as Spittler and myself, he claimed that participation inevitably meant sharing sensory and bodily experience with others, or "life lived in common" (Jackson 1998, see also Jackson 2002, 2005). Lumping participation and observation together meant to ignore the fundamental difference between the two. His main objective was, however, to place ethnography in the middle between subjectivism with its focus on emic world-views and objectivism with its attempts to generalise from naively collected data.

Towards the Emic Evaluation Approach (EEA)

The Emic Evaluation Approach (EEA hereafter) was an attempt to bring the different reflections on ethnographic fieldwork together. The EEA in its first formulation had two related aims: Firstly, it addressed the tension between verbal articulations and practice; and secondly, it wanted to overcome the opposition of "subjectivism and objectivism" in Jackson's terms or, in other words, between a micro-sociological and a generalising perspective. The EEA was then formulated in the context of research projects.[6] It consisted of three elements that were linked by a circular research methodology borrowed from grounded theory: 1.) an identification of social actors, 2.) a discourse analysis of how they related to each other, and 3.) an analysis of their respective social practices.

Before outlining the EEA more in depth, I need to state briefly what it is not. Though it bears some similarities to other methodologies in the social sciences, the EEA has a peculiar character. It is not simply a combination of two or three different methods that are used to cross-check the results of the others or "… to search for regularities in

5 Paul Riesman's work on the Fulani of northern Burkina Faso hast to be mentioned here (Riesman 1977), and later Unni Wikan's work on Cairo and Muslim society (e.g. Wikan 1996).

6 In its initial version, EEA was developed in 2007 for the research project on "Trust in Post-conflict Societies" by Gregor Dobler, Kerstin Bauer and myself, though it owed much to the methodology of the preceding project on Visual Culture in Urban Africa. It was later applied to several other projects, in particular to "The Work of State Imageries" and to a comparative project on the public sphere in Johannesburg and Maputo.

the research data" (O'Donoghue/Punch 2003:78). Triangulation, the term usually used for such cross-examinations, does not capture the difference between the three elements of the EEA because they are based on different epistemologies. The two main elements of the EEA, discourse- and practice analysis, provide insights into how actors engage with their lifeworld[7] – but they generate different kinds of data that are not readily comparable. These differences as the main pillars of the EEA, however, are nonetheless related to each other and could be mapped as the three cornerstones of a triangle that is at the centre of a circular research methodology.

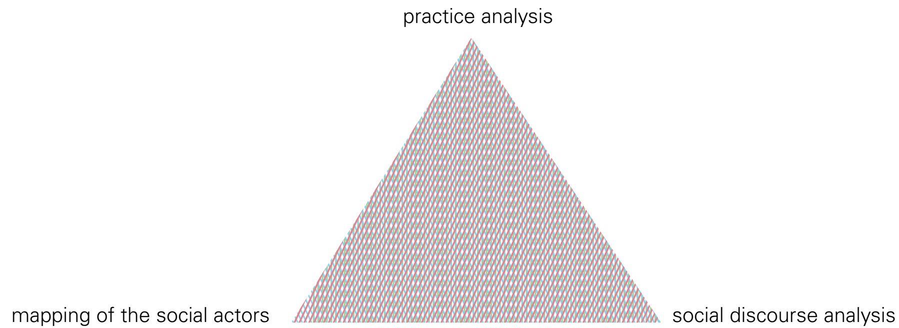


Fig. 1
The three elements of the Emic Evaluation Approach 2007

1.) A Mapping of the Social Actors. It provided the basic data on who the actors are. It was largely a constructivist procedure that traced the ascription of identities to particular actors by other actors. This data is then complemented by an analysis of the basic social structure of the groups. Special emphasis was given to ethnicity, religion, age and their inner organisation. This allowed us to provide a descriptive picture of who is who in the areas of research, in this case three cities in northern Côte d'Ivoire and another in northern Namibia. Right from the beginning, it was clear, however, that the ascription of identities was essentially a discursive practice, which needed to be addressed as such. Hence the second element of the EEA.

2.) Social Discourse Analysis. Again, standard procedures in the social sciences were applied, i.e. this step retraces relationships between social actors by examining what they say about each other and how they react to such articulations. Unlike Foucauldian discourse analysis, however, the EEA does not aim at the general structures of discourse where the actors just occupy a particular position without having much agency of their own. On the contrary, the EEA aimed at the opposite: it assumes that the actors have agency and that their relationship to discursive formations is dialectical; they are shaped by them while simultaneously shaping them. In this first version of the EEA, we claimed that discourse is not merely limited to verbal utterances, but that it incorporates all possible signs and symbols through which the actors actually do communicate their interests. But we started from the assumption that the main driving force of discourse is language. In the course of research, however, we had to modify this basic assumption, giving equal status to all possible communicative expressions.

3.) Practice Analysis. The analysis of practice was labelled as the core competence of anthropologists. The methodology applied here came close to extended case studies

7 The concept of lifeworld is adopted from German phenomenology. *Lebenswelt* was introduced in the social sciences by Alfred Schütz (Schütz 1932, Schütz/Luckmann 1979). It stands for the horizon of all possible, subjectively meaningful social action from the actors' point of view. As basic social reality, it stands for what is given and experienced in common. It is worth noting that the concept of lifeworld does not mean the view of life or world-view, *Weltanschauung*, because it includes both elements of subjective perception and pre-given elements that are not subject to the social or individual constitution of sense.

as pioneered by Max Gluckman and later refined by scholars of the Manchester School (e.g. from Epstein 1967 to Evens/Handelman 2006). It meant to follow the involved social actors (as identified in step one) and analyse how they engage in social practice and what consequences events have on how they interact. After having identified relevant practices for the thematic field of study, they would contrast with the outcome of step two, i.e. social discourse analysis. The aim was to clarify the relation between cultural assumptions and persuasions as they become visible in the discursive formation on the one hand and social practice on the other. Assuming that both will reshape how social actors identify each other, one would then contrast the findings again with the initial mapping of social actors – bring the circular procedure back to the start.

This initial version of the EEA had shortcomings that became more apparent through the research process. One of the difficulties was how to distinguish between discourse on the one hand and social practice on the other: a discursive formation always builds on the social practice of the actors that engage in it, and vice versa, social practice is embedded in discursive formations. In other words, there were no clear criteria how to distinguish between the two. In addition, the circular procedure could start from every corner of the triangle, and it was not clear to what degree the identification of social actors was already based on preconceived assumptions of their existence. Despite such internal criticisms – which we did not share with the academic community at the time –, the EEA was perceived by the reviewers of our research projects as a strong methodology to analyse social reality in a difficult setting affected by violent conflicts.

Appresentation and Simultaneity

The remaining paragraphs will try to overcome the conceptual weaknesses of the EEA by bringing the different threads of reflection together. I will argue in two steps: First, I will outline two essentially different modes of relating to others by linking them to the phenomenological insights outlined above. This step mainly argues that sociality in the sense of Georg Simmel is not an amorphous entity but composed of two different kinds. The second step of my argument consists of how these two modes can be addressed by two different epistemologies leading to two methodologies that were inherently incorporated in the EEA but not made explicit.

The two modes of relating to others are appresentation and intersubjectivity. As appresentation is not frequently used in the social sciences, I need to introduce the term a little. In their phenomenology of the social world, Edmund Husserl (1929, §§ 50–52) and Alfred Schütz (1932) had argued that there are two modes of relating to others. The first, they claim, is based on experience that envisions all that is usually related to what I perceive. Appresentation thus associates sedimented experience to what is present at the moment of actual experience. For instance, if I hear a sound that resembles the word "table", I will immediately associate experiences I have had earlier in my life, i.e. the *general notion* of a table that I am familiar with. We do not question the validity of the general notion when we hear the word, we appresent it as real. In other words: we take the sound as an index to the word and the idea and not as an artificial sign or symbol – though it actually is one. Appresentation hence provides an access to what is actually inaccessible; the experience of the other. It is only through appresentation that we can communicate on things absent. Appresentation is the perception of the invisible, of things present in the minds of us and others.

This understanding of how we perceive and envision lifeworldly reality follows the daily conduct of social life. It does not divide signifier and signified as semiotics and linguistics usually do. In our daily routines, we take the two as one – and indeed, we have to because we would not be able to act if we were constantly distinguishing between them. Two points need to be mention here: Firstly, appresentation is a generic term. It covers all communication by such 'signifying' means; oral, visual, and all

other. Language, however, is the most obvious and widespread sphere of appresentation. Secondly, appresentation is a process. It builds on an analogous equation of the life-worldly experience of others and mine that does not build on shared sensory or bodily experience. In daily social practice, it means to assume that something else is present along with what is actually presented. It would be a mistake, however, to frame this as 'signifying practice', 'symbolism' or 'symbolic interactionism'. Husserl and Schütz wanted to overcome the distinction between signifier and signified because it does not meet the practice of daily social interactions.

For the purpose of this paper, such reflections are immediately relevant because they make us aware of appresentation as the basis of a peculiar mode of relating to others. Appresentation is unavoidably the privileged mode of communicating to others when it comes to issues that transcend the horizon of the immediately accessible life-world (Schütz/Luckmann 1979, part II.B). It informs communication whenever the actors address subjects beyond their presently shared lifeworld, i.e. their "life lived in common". Appresentation permeates almost all political interactions that are inevitably about issues that transcend the immediate experience of the actors. Because of the inaccessibility of direct intersubjectivity in situations where such issues surface, actors have to articulate their sedimented experience by means of appresentation.[8] Articulation stands for all intentional acts that aim at relating to other social actors, be they individuals or groups or institutionalised entities.[9]

Articulation based on appresentation is hence both intentional and incorporates pre-existing experience. Whenever we articulate things not present, for instance in the past or in a possible future, as we do when talking about social and political issues, we have to rely on appresentation. Appresentation is the realm in which discursive formations emerge – or more precisely: discursive formations have to build on appresentation. By the same token, they are accessible through such means. The appropriate methods would be to listen and to observe (not merely to hear or to see), because they presume attention, i.e. the ethnographer is focusing on a subject, an issue or at least a theme. The interview is but a narrow register of how an ethnographer can access such discursive formations, there are many more windows on it: the actors may, for instance, articulate by unfolding and refining imageries that address the other.

Very much like the post-structuralists (e.g. Laclau 1996, Laclau/Mouffe 1985), I claim that a Foucauldian understanding of discourse as related speech acts does not recognise the many possibilities of appresenting things absent and hence of articulation of intentional actors. Unlike critical discourse analysis, however, I argue that discursive formations are not all-embracing in the sense that all social interactions are necessarily embedded in discourses. The understanding of discourse put forward here is narrower. Discourse is based on articulation as its basic constitutive element. The central and unavoidable feature is that, in a discursive formation, actors cannot directly engage in a participatory exchange of knowledge. Because they express claims about something

8 This corresponds to the German original of *kundgeben*; see Schütz (1932 [1960: 182–6]). In a more general understanding, the act of articulating needs a much more comprehensive reflection in the social sciences. It would have to differentiate between how interests, claims and other expressions in the political field are mediated. For instance, a speech act differs from an act that makes use of pictures that Bredekamp2010 explores in his stimulating work. However, despite all possible differences, such act all relate to the one capacity of the human mind and remain linked to each other.

9 A collection of empirical studies on social movements may serve as an illustration of the power of a phenomenological understanding of articulation (Vahabzadeh 2003). Another reminder may be appropriate, too: Articulation is used here as a phenomenological concept, not as it was once used in the analysis of the political economy of colonialism. Articulation in this sense meant the dependency of subordinate modes of production from the dominant, capitalist modes of production in the centres of world economy (Meillassoux 1975, Rey 1973, for a critique see Berman 1984).

that is not directly perceptible through the senses, they need to recur to appresentative modes of relating to others. Articulating one's interests or claims means that the person that makes such a claim engages in an expressive act about something that is not (yet) existent. The fact that it goes beyond the immediate moment and that it may concern more than the immediately present persons lend a particular character to such articulations. What is articulated may become a social reality in the future or it may belong to the collective imaginary, but in all cases, it is not the subject of daily experience. The subject of such discursive formations is about possible social order or, at times, disorder. Actors must articulate their interests, their claims or their rejection of claims of others by using appresentation as basic means of interaction and communication. After having sharpened the understanding of discourse, its role as an element of the EEA is more distinct and clear: discourse analysis offers a partial but precisely focused access to social reality. Suffice to add that this mode is often privileged in ethnographic enquiry because it avoids a problem that one would immediately encounter when engaging in "life lived in common". The ethnographer does not need to 'translate' bodily experience into 'language' – that is already done by the actors. What the ethnographer still needs to do, however, is to translate from one language to the other. Put simply, discourse analysis is a powerful instrument but it avoids the epistemological difficulties that arise with intersubjectivity in shared sensory and bodily experience.

Intersubjectivity has never been a central concept of social anthropological methodology. Despite its outstanding importance for what is usually labelled as participant observation, very few textbooks on anthropological methods mention it as the point where ethnographic data are generated by the interaction of the researcher with others. Surprisingly, too, there is not much on it in the more recent debates on methodology in sociology and other social sciences. Several conceptual problems are blurred and not thoroughly analysed. In order to sharpen the understanding of practice analysis as the third element of the EEA, I will address only the problems that could cause a misunderstanding of what I intend to argue here.

The first problem that needs some reflection is that of the origin of other consciousness, that is how knowledge of the other social actor is acquired. I am convinced that becoming aware of other consciousness and intentionality as field data is much more generated by living in common with others than by conducting interviews and asking questions. Intersubjectivity emerges while actors participate in the same practice. Unlike appresentation, which does not need to build on living in common, the simultaneity of sensory experience acquired through shared practice is the basis of intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is not about predicative meaning, it is about overlapping perspectives on the lifeworld. As such, it needs empathy and the will to take the other as subject rather than as an object. When intersubjectivity emerges, it means that the researcher increasingly becomes aware of how the other sees the ethnographer and vice versa. Needless to say that this overlapping of perspectives is the work of those who simultaneously engage in that bodily and sensory experience. It is a question of how and to what degree the actors get involved with each other. Worldly experience is then shared to some degree as one lifeworld. Evidently, there are limits to this sharing: A total congruence of perspectives is almost impossible, and empathy may take different forms, too. However, to deny the possibility of intersubjectivity would mean to misconceive the anthropological condition of social life. When it happens, it can be a deeply enriching experience for all participants. Intersubjectivity is a circular process that happens everyday in all societies. The difference between such everyday intersubjectivity and intersubjectivity as part of ethnographic participation is that the ethnographer has, or should have, a raised awareness to such differences, and that the difference between the two lifeworldly perspectives is usually wider. The basic characteristics are, however, the same because they build on the human condition as such.

A premise for intersubjectivity to emerge is, because of its sensory and bodily basis, the simultaneity of experience. Bodily 'knowledge' is not necessarily conscious,

A team of hairdressers poses to display their profession, commenting on the white ethnographer in front of them. Bamenda 2001
Photo: Till Förster

as we all know when we think about traumatising events that are often the subject of suppression and alienation.[10] The central point here is the pre-predicative character of what we gain by shared experience and the emergence of overlapping perspectives on the lifeworld. More often than not, the actors cannot put into words what they experience or how they share experience and develop such overlapping perspectives. This is not because they would not be willing to express them in words and other means of appresentation, it is because this living in common often eludes verbal expression.

Participation then is a method that generates different kind of data through shared sensory and bodily experience. To use such data only to ask "more informative questions" (Davies 1999:73), as conventional textbooks claim, is an error of categories. It does not recognise that sedimented lifeworldly experience is largely unconscious and that the quest to put it into words misses its essential character. It would mean to urge the other to say something that is neither a discursive object nor a subject of articulation. Furthermore, it would mean to ignore the fundamental difference of the two epistemologies. What is needed but has not been done so far is a long-term examination of participation in the field. Such an examination has to go beyond catchwords as 'thick participation'. It has to analyse and reflect on two related effects of participation:

- the constitution and sedimentation of experience through intersubjectivity;
- the shift of the researcher's attitudes to the other lifeworld.

More generally, this reflection is about the relationship between the individual and society – but it is also about the origin of consciousness, i.e. when does the experience of other lifeworldly realities lead to a raised awareness of and finally a focussed attention on difference. This would then lead back to the relationship of practice to discourse.

The following essays are all about this tension. They all look at how the authors as researchers were identifying social actors through social practice on the one hand and discursive formations on the other and how the actors then shaped the two. The circular methodology they engaged in led to a (re)appraisal of the actors' agency. All accounts that follow testify to their capacity to carve out a place for themselves in a world that was often depressive and discouraging. But they also show how much the analysis was finally led by the social reality the researchers studied.

10 On alienation as a post-marxist concept of social philosophy see the highly impressive work of Jaeggi 2005.

The EEA – Experiences and Reflections from Current Research

On centre stage of the second part of this working paper are vignettes from research practice. They foreground the complexities of accessing social realities, and the demanding process of becoming aware of and reflecting on difference. The intention is to share some experiences with and critical reflection on the EEA from the field, in a structured effort to strengthen a still relatively young methodology. The vignettes are written by members of the Research Group on Political Transformations at the Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Basel. They are all working with the EEA in their research projects, and have contributed to developing and elaborating the EEA in the past years.[11]

As will be underscored in the following pages, one of the key – and, we believe, unique – strengths of the EEA is the way that it allows for fundamentally different modes of analyses to be employed in empirical research. More than just a compilation of different types of methods probing the same research question, the EEA is a methodology with which the relationship between different dimensions of social reality can be analysed. At the same time, this dynamic and reflexive circular research process is also very demanding, for it requires constant critical reflection by the researcher as well as a delicate balance of both immersion into and distance from social reality. This balancing act, however, is inscribed into the methodology itself, distinguished as it is by its interaction between discursive analysis, an analysis of practice as well as long(er)-term participation. Some of the methods employed to capture these dimensions pose practical and analytical difficulties even in the most straightforward conditions. Combine these experiences with the challenge of employing a sophisticated multidimensional methodological framework on the one hand, and the difficulties of very demanding research contexts on the other hand, and you will have set the stage for some of the issues that the following vignettes will be addressing.

Evidently, the thoughts and experiences shared here are not exhaustive. The task that the group set itself was to select particular situations and experiences that highlight one or several aspects of the EEA. To facilitate both the selection and the discussion, these individual reflections are illuminated from one of the cornerstones of the EEA-triangle. From this vantage point, the methodological process is unfolded, which is singular within each research context. It sheds light on the ways in which EEA is being employed in current research, the insights unlocked through the circular approach structured by the EEA, as well as some key difficulties encountered in research practice.

Taking us on a walk to the beach in Maputo, Barbara Heer outlines the way in which the EEA can be adopted for specific research questions, neatly tracing the different analytical perspectives it opens up. She profiles the ways in which the access to social practice can be fraught with manifold practical difficulties that serve to challenge and unsettle researchers in ways not previewed by a research plan – and shows how unplanned and unplannable experiences of participation may lead to sensory access to other lifeworlds.

Precisely this unplannable aspect of "living life in common" is an aspect which Michelle Engeler shares in her vignette. Having experienced stormy political periods in Guéckédou, Guinea, she reflects on how the fact of her having 'stuck out' during these difficult times allowed her not only a bodily understanding of fears and realities of her

11 The EEA has been continually reflected and refined in a series of methodology workshops organised by the Research Group on Political Transformations on 2 September 2009, 8 April 2011, 26 June 2011, and 22 August 2011, leading to this issue No 3 of the Basel Paper on Political Transformations.

informants, in itself an invaluable sensory experience. But equally importantly, it also changed the quality of her interaction with her informants by endowing her with credibility and integrity for having shared those times with them. Both Heer and Engeler thus profile the centrality of participation in accessing social practice, and their accounts underline the importance of time – in the sense of longterm field work – in gaining deeper access to “living life in common”.

In her account of Monrovia, Andrea Kaufmann reflects upon some of the challenges of conducting research in a large, confusing, insecure and constantly changing urban environment. Here, the challenges of participation and even observation are enormous, especially as many areas are considered to be highly insecure. In this fluid and challenging environment, the acute question is how to assess discourses on security and insecurity if simultaneity poses a threat to ones own security? How to make head and tail of discrepancies between discourses of insecurity and seemingly conflicting social practices? Again, time features as a central component of gaining access to different lifeworlds, to achieving a deeper understanding of social practices and discourses of (in) security.

The barriers of accessing and sharing “life in common” are depicted in Kerstin Bauer’s vignette on research in a post-conflict setting in northern Côte d’Ivoire. With a research question focussed on trust in a post-conflict setting, one of the most challenging aspects of undertaking research into social realities was precisely the mistrust Bauer faced as a researcher – much like Förster (above) or Heer (below) also experienced. Was she not a spy? Or a journalist? Access to social realities becomes clearly bounded under these circumstances; a challenging experience which can, however, lead to new insights into both discourses and social practices of the social actors, albeit requiring a change of analytical perspective from the researcher.

The difficulty of not just accessing, but also of gaining a deeper understanding the divergency between discourse and social practice are also a theme of Kathrin Heitz’ research in the town of Man, Côte d’Ivoire. Living in a town governed by rebels, the issue of security was of particular salience in everyday practices as well as on a discursive level – interestingly, however, and in distinction to for instance Heer’s and Kaufmann’s contributions, on centre stage was the question *which social actor* was considered safe and trustworthy, not which area was considered to be safe. She draws our attention to the differing experiences of (in)security that are both verbal and non-verbal, the ways in which power manifests itself over and for social actors, and the juddering circularity with which different social realities revealed themselves through participation.

The five vignettes are rounded of by a coda in which Förster picks up some key themes and weaves them into the concepts and critiques outlined in the introductory essay, thus outlining future steps in the elaboration of the EEA.

EEA, Public Space and the Unruliness of the Analysis of Practice

Barbara Heer

Introduction

"Next Sunday, we are planning to go to the beach, me and the girls, do you want to join it?" This for a young fieldworker magical sentence wakes me up from the paralysed state of mind caused by the inhuman humidity of this late December afternoon in Maputo. Memories of endless failed attempts of trying to share in the urban youth's experience of the beach flash before my mind's eye: either it had rained on the weekend, I was invited to some other event or I was just too tired and wanted to do what Maputo residents do on a Sunday: meet family/friends and relax. When finally my field assistant and I managed to go to the beach on a sunny Sunday, the beach was so packed that I almost lost him in the crowd, as he walked very fast along the congested beach road, nimbly avoiding the wheels of taxis and cars which were trying to find their way through the dense crowd of young people. Feeling clumsy, I was not only concerned about the car bumpers that came dangerously close to my knees, but I was also trying to assess what would happen if I attracted the (playful? violent?) attention of the heavily drunken young men dancing on top of cars and squeezing past us and the jammed cars. Accompanying a group of young women was therefore an important opportunity to complete my analysis of public space, which had till now mainly consisted of mapping and discourse analysis, with the maybe most challenging approach: the analysis of practice through participation and observation in daily experience. We had already decided who was responsible to bring along the soft drinks, the chicken and the *xima* (maize por-

Participation in practices that do not constitute daily life requires a certain time span spent in the field. Catembe beach, Maputo, on New Year's Day 2011, *Photo: Barbara Heer*

ridge), when on Saturday, I received a text message from my friend cancelling the beach outing due to a funeral. Seriously disappointed, I decided to go to the beach anyway in company of another friend, but after five minutes of having attracted the (playful, not violent) attention of the drunk men, we almost wanted to leave, when I received a phone call of an informant saying that he was on the beach with friends from church and inviting us to join in. This time, the magical sentence turned into some sweaty, sandy hours of sharing in their beach experience.

This example stems from fieldwork conducted in the scope of a PhD project on public space in Maputo and Johannesburg.[12] By comparing two cities with each a specific history of segregation, it aims at describing the complex interplay between the physical and social consequences of this history with public life in these cities today.

This brief contribution has two aims: first it wants to lay out one possibility of how the EEA can be adopted to the analysis of specific public spaces, using as an example the urban beach in Maputo.[13] Second, it draws attention to one of the challenges of the EEA: the access to practice.

Adoption of the EEA to the Analysis of Public Spaces

In accordance with the revision of the concept of space, in this research project, space is not conceptualised as the physical background for social practice ('container model'), but as a social product (e.g. Lefebvre 1991 [1974]). The conceptual starting point is therefore a three-level approach to public space, which understands it as constituted by the built environment, social practice and the discursive realm.[14]

1.) The Mapping of the Public Space. When the EEA is applied to the analysis of a public space, it is useful to analytically distinguish between two different dimensions of mapping: the mapping of the built environment and the mapping of the social actors found relevant to this public space.

Using a combination of different methods – exploratory walks, photographic documentation, expert interviews, informal conversations, archival and literature research – basic data on the structure of the beach, its position within the cityscape and its historical development with regard to its physicality, uses and perception can be collected.

Observation, informal and formal conversations, but also attention to discourses on the beach in daily life and in the media allowed the mapping of actors: the different groups of users from the fishermen to the weekend flaneurs, the expatriates and the elite living in the adjacent gated communities, environmental organisations, the owner and employees of the restaurants and the food stalls, the police and many others.

2.) Practice Analysis. To address how actors actually use and appropriate public space, the core competence of anthropologists, the analysis of practice, is employed. Systematic observation is a central method for this element of the EEA, as it allows the collection of data about the use of the space from the fishermen in the early morning to the secret lovers' meetings in the evening. But in order to shift from the position of an outside observer to an understanding of the lived experience, participation – in this case the accompanying of different actors on their beach related activities – is absolutely crucial. In order to be able to do a thick description of the meaning the beach has in its context of urban life, it is not enough to only observe interactions on the beach, but to

12 At the time of writing, nine months of fieldwork had been conducted between 2010 and 2011.

13 I specifically looked at the section of the beach in front of the Portuguese Restaurant Costa do Sol at the Marginal avenue.

14 See also Löw et al. 2007, Förster 1999, and Wildner 2003.

accompany the users from the planning and the anticipation to the walk to the beach, the time at the beach, then the late walk home and the following retroflection about the outing. Participation does not only entail seeing and talking, but also sharing in the bodily experience of what eludes verbal expression, such as for instance navigating through the crowd. Participation in and observation of practice, the simultaneity of experience and the emergence of intersubjectivity is what distinguishes the anthropological from other approaches to the use of space.

3.) Social Discourse Analysis. The third element of the analysis of a public space is social discourse analysis. How do the different actors talk in daily life about the beach, what discourses can be encountered in everyday life, in the media, in discourses of politicians and the municipality? Again, different methods are used for data collection, e.g. participation in daily life, archival research and different forms of interviews. Attention is not only given to verbal statements, but also for instance the photos that beach goers upload on their Facebook profile. Discourse analysis can also draw attention to actors and practices which go beyond those found to be relevant in the two other steps: It can for example include utterances of people who avoid the city beach.

For each of the three elements, which are applied in a circular manner, not one after the other, various methods of data collection are drawn upon. Many of these methods, e.g. systematic observation or expert interviews, can be planned to a certain extent, but the analysis of practice eludes the same controllability by the researcher. I would like to illustrate this in the following section using some examples from my ongoing fieldwork in Maputo and Johannesburg. This contribution wants to draw attention to the unruliness of practice analysis, my examples mainly focusing on the question of access to practice, i.e. the ability of the researcher to manoeuvre herself into a situation where she can participate.

The Unruliness of the Analysis of Practice

Apart from people who use the beach for their economic activities (fishermen, saleswomen, parking guards etc.), most residents of Maputo go there on an irregular basis, maybe on the weekend or on public holidays, or not even then. Visiting this specific public space constitutes for them not daily life, but it is an extraordinary activity. Completing all the three elements of the EEA, especially the analysis of practice, then constitutes a challenge as the probability that the researcher can accompany informants during the couple of months she stays in the field is not very high. Developing a network of informants and friends in whose life she can share and who are willing to take her with on their beach outings also needs considerable time.

This points to another factor that is decisive for getting access to practice, namely trust. Part of this project focused on a young, wealthy neighbourhood in Maputo where members of the Frelimo elite (the ruling party), of the commercial Indian elite and of the expatriate community live. The social position of the urban elite in Maputo is characterised by an intermingling of economic, bureaucratic and political power, and exposed members of the Frelimo party and the Indian elite have been repeatedly blamed in the media for involvement in illicit activities like corruption and drug trafficking. Probably in relation to this, the residents of the wealthy neighbourhood were very protective of their privacy, which made research a difficult task. Even if my research assistant and I could build a relationship of trust with one resident, it was hardly possible to get into contact with other neighbours through them ('snowball approach'), as they even protected the privacy of their neighbours.[15] Due to this shield of mistrust we only

15 They did not disclose names of other residents and if they did, they emphasised that we should not disclose to the other residents who referred us to them. When we had received a list of phone numbers and names of some members of the residents' association, they clearly tried to avoid us.

managed to conduct interviews and systematic observation in the neighbourhood and its public places, but one of the three elements of the EEA, the analysis of practice, remained cursory.

Mobility can become a challenge for the research process in an insecure environment like Alexandra township, Johannesburg.
Photo: Thabo Mopasi, March 2011

Another factor that might obstruct access to practice is the security of the researcher. In the Alexandra township in Johannesburg, I was following the activities of a youth organisation who had illegally occupied a building, where they now held meetings and organised events for the local youth. The building, which had been donated to the township for community activities, had become, as people call it, "a white elephant", when, after ambiguities of who is responsible for it, government took over and let it stand empty till they would decide for a utilisation of the building.

After attending a meeting of the youth group in the evening, I was told that they were going to have another meeting now with a local government official where they would discuss the situation of the illegally occupied building. It would have been an important situation for me to observe the interaction between the youth and the government official. But I had to balance this opportunity with the risk that driving home through the township and its surrounding industrial areas late at night could constitute for me, as car hijackings are very frequent in the area. Conducting interviews is much easier in such a dangerous environment than participating in daily life, which just happens and often challenges the guidelines which the fieldworker developed for herself to create a sense of security. I decided to go home and, while driving out of the township, I knew that putting my own security over the collection of data meant that I would only be able to ask questions about, but not observe it.

The above examples illustrate different factors that obstructed the access to practice in this research project, such as the irregularity with which the activities we wanted to observe happened, mistrust or the personal security of the researcher. Far from suggesting a solution to the difficulty of accessing practice, which is specific to the researcher and the research context, I want to call attention to one dimension of fieldwork that, drawing on my field experience, seems very important for a methodological approach that aims at living in common: time.

In the case of going to the beach as an extraordinary activity, the probability that the researcher will be there during a public holiday or a sunny Sunday where her friends go to the beach, is much higher when she is there for a prolonged stay than on a short field visit. The longer she is familiar with the field, the broader her network will be, a network of friends and informants who will remember to invite her. The same can be argued with regard to the distrustful urban elite. Trust has to be built up over time and may emerge with repeated visits to the informants. Only by and by, with patience and some luck we might be able to lose the ascribed identity of the suspicious spy-journalist-researchers and get access to practice. In the example of participation in meetings late at night in a South African township, the case is a bit different: In my opinion, it would be dangerous if a prolonged stay in the field led to a false confidence in handling risky situations, e.g. driving at night despite the warnings. But given enough time, the

researcher could find solutions like sleeping over at a friend's house or looking for an accommodation in the immediate surroundings or in a secure section of the township.

Concluding Remarks

Anthropological fieldwork has changed considerably since the paradigmatic studies such as Malinowski's account of the Trobriand Islands. The existence of an extensive literature on ethnographic methods could convey to the inexperienced fieldworker the impression of a high degree of standardisation and controllability. The practice of doing about one year of fieldwork for a PhD in Anthropology contradicts with the expectation of funding institutions to finish a PhD within three years. In a comparative study between two cities and between different neighbourhoods like in the project from which the above examples were drawn, careful time management becomes decisive. But the analysis of practice is unruly. Participation in daily practices and the development of intersubjectivity can hardly be planned and put into a time frame. Instead, there is a considerable amount of stubborn uncertainty, which the fieldworker needs to endure with patience, time, and flexibility.

Ending this paper I draw on a last, maybe a bit unusual example to illustrate the unruliness of practice analysis. One evening, I was walking with a friend in the city centre of Maputo. Distracted by our conversation, we chose a street that is popular amongst joggers and lovers during the day, but commonly disadvised to be used at night. Indeed, after a few minutes, a man appeared out of the dark, threatened us with a knife and disburdened us of our mobile phones. We went to the police station, where I got access to non-official crime statistics and could observe interactions between the police, citizens and even detainees late at night. In the following days I temporarily developed a fear of the dark – my heart sometimes started bumping very loud and all my senses were alert as if I had to be ready to run away – and I gave the night guard a large tip so that he would pay special attention to my place. This gave me the calm to sleep despite the noises of the night, which had suddenly become threatening to me. This very personal, uneasy experience of urban crime turned out to be a treasure box; for example, it assisted me in developing an understanding of the individual motivations that drive many wealthy residents in Maputo and Johannesburg to draw up high walls and electric fences around their houses. By saying that, I don't mean that my experience of and reactions after the assault were the same as my informants would experience it. But the assault with its bodily aftershock enhanced my empathy and contributed to the increased overlapping of my perspective with my informants‘ perspectives on the lifeworld, or, in other words, intersubjectivity.

Obviously, becoming victim of an assault cannot be planned. It is not an experience that the researcher anticipated or would ever want to repeat. It is definitely not a situation that any introduction to ethnographic methods would mention to the reader or that a supervisor would recommend to her student. Although this is an extreme case of an experience that contributes to this element of the EEA, it illustrates well how unruly practice analysis is. Sometimes, it needs a lot of patience and insistence, and sometimes, it just happens.

Listening, Experiencing, Observing – Reflections On Doing Fieldwork

Michelle Engeler

Introduction

The following reflections are part of my PhD project, which focuses on the youth state nexus in Guinea. The overall objective is a better understanding of how youth relates to state making processes and statehood negotiating[16] in Guéckédou, a small border town in the far southeast of the country. Thus, part of this research is the empirical challenge of grasping 'youth' or 'youthscapes' (Meira and Soep 2005). Key questions relate to their social reality: How do young people perceive their lifeworld and how do they attribute meaning to it? In other words; how can one understand the social reality of youths? For a broader depth understanding, interactions and discourses are crucial; the latter discusses how to interpret issues of social life; the former refers to social practices. One of the aims of the EEA is to grasp both dimensions of social reality. In addition, the EEA intends to access the connections between political transformations, intersubjectivity and personal or collective agency through ethnographic methods. This is a shared concern of other social anthropologists working in precarious settings.[17] For instance, Greenhouse points out that political transformations and conflict change the way in which people experience their world (Greenhouse 2002: 23). How can we as anthropologists research situations of flux and fragmentation? The EEA serves as a very helpful methodological lens to answer these questions.

The following paragraphs aim to present a number of fieldwork experiences. I will start with some personal methodological reflections related to the EEA and spotlight on listening, sharing experiences, and observing/analysing practices. As the underlying research project does not only deal with 'youth', I include reflections related to different social actors.

Thus, while doing research, I used to talk[18] and live with various members of society; some of them were situated in the realm of the Guinean state apparatus and different "twilight institutions" (Lund 2006), others were family fathers, market women, students, temporary travelling companions or simply my neighbours. Thus, I tried to listen to the various "murmuring voices of societies" (De Certeau 1988: v).

16 I understand 'negotiating' as a process in which power plays a crucial role. Thus, I do not start from the premise that the different actors who are involved in negotiating processes are (de jure or de facto) equal. For further details on "negotiating statehood" as an approach to the dynamic and complex dimensions of statehood, see e.g. Hagmann/Péclard 2010.

17 This is a concern also discussed in the reader 'Ethnography in unstable places' edited by Carol J. Gree house and co-authors (Greenhouse et al., eds., 2002).

18 By 'talking' I mean various forms of conversations, ranging from informal chats, dialogues to quite official interviews. Thus, depending on the topic – and the actors – I applied different types of 'talking'. Within this short essay, however, I only refer to those life history interviews I have collected with young people. For some critical remarks regarding interviews, see Förster in the introductory essay above.

Listening – Research on youth living at the margins of the local, the national, and the global has become a major subject among social scientists working in African settings and elsewhere.[19] For Mamadou Diouf young people are central concerns of African studies (Diouf 2003), Jay Straker speaks of a 'boom' in youth studies arising over the last decade (Straker 2007). One of the challenges of researching youth concerns the often noticed 'mobility' of young people (Porter, et al. 2010). Youthful life trajectories in Guéckédou are indeed highly mobile: young people who finish secondary education most likely leave their hometown to study in distant regional capitals; young men having difficulties finding a stable income may engage in transnational trade; young women running a household most likely come from distant villages to only temporarily support their relatives in town. For these reasons, it can be difficult to grasp the different social networks, turning points and crossroads of a youthful life's journey. The following paragraph is picked out of my 'Memo',[20] which I used during fieldwork to pause and think; where I contemplated and roughly analysed data gathered, and critically reflected about methodological issues.

> I again walked with Kumba to Tamba's télé centre in Guéckédou-Lélé. She is a really interesting person and I would love to spend more time with her. However, she will soon leave Guéckédou to continue her studies in Conakry. What about 'following her'? Mhhh. Somehow not a good idea. I should avoid Conakry these days. So much for George Marcus… How, then, would it be possible to grasp her social network, her 'youthscape' or at least her everyday live?

To tackle the issue of mobile youth, I started collecting – and listening to – different life stories, permitting geographic mapping and the tracing of the different localities (Bjarnesen 2009). Through the means of these life stories, I could also collect data related to gender, generational relations or different stages of a youthful life. Thus, the approach allows for conclusions regarding the broader social setting – and gives answers on how young people describe and give meaning to different chapters of their lifeworld. How does a young woman who studies in a regional capital share her family history and origins? Why does a young man prefer cross border trade to being a teacher at a local school? How does a motorbike taxi driver explain his past as a member of a violent self-defence group? The answers to these and other questions relate to various discourses, e.g. on social belonging, on border towns, or on economic navigation.

Sharing Experiences – To further access different dimensions of social reality, however, participating in the social practices of others is also crucial. Anthropological fieldwork is not just about asking questions related to specific topics – it is much more a general interest in the whole person, in the whole society. Accordingly, during my stay in Guéckédou I went to funerals, weddings and baptisms, I cried and laughed with friends and neighbours, I listened to their sorrows and shared emotions… I also shared politically turbulent times – one of the crucial aspects while becoming familiar with the social setting of Guéckédou.

After violent clashes between the military in power and supporters from opposing groups in Conakry in September 2009, most Europeans and North Americans left the country, following the advises from their embassies. As I felt safe in Guéckédou I decided to stay, prepared to leave the country towards Liberia whenever tensions should further increase. During this time I shared important experiences with my neighbours

19 Several readers on the topic have been published; see amongst others Boyden/Berry 2004; Burton/Charton-Bigot 2010; Christiansen, et al. 2006; Honwana/de Boeck 2005.

20 I translated and abridged the Memo.

and friends. For example, I learned the importance of international radio stations – between 6 and 7 pm we usually met on two wooden benches in the neighbourhood, intently listening to BBC Afrique and Radio France International. Usually, some passers-by joined and together we discussed and interpreted the news, and reflected on the consequences. Each of us contributed with additional information he or she had heard during the day, e.g. referring to rumours, which circulated in town or beyond. Sometimes we called friends in Conakry and asked about the situation in the capital.

At that time, I experienced the variety of sounds during the nights as quite dangerous and more than once I was laying in my bed, thinking primarily about escape routes out of my house, in case some soldiers would enter through the main gate.[21] After several nightmares I talked to one of my best friends, the head of my host family, who lived, however, not in the same building but close by. He lent a sympathetic ear to my fears and in the same conversation I learnt about his own worries. Finally, we started joking about the issue. I promised to get him out of the military camp whenever he would be kidnapped, and he promised to come with me towards Liberia or Côte d'Ivoire whenever necessary. Although we laughed when discussing the details of both, me talking to the militaries and possible escape routes, we shared sorrows and feelings of fear.

After several months of absence I came back to Guéckédou in June 2010, shortly before the presidential elections. When my friends now introduced me to others, I was constantly reminded of having shared difficult times with them: Usually, they told the dialogue partners right at the beginning that I had stayed in Guinea during 2009, when other non-Guineans left, and that I came back again to get through the elections which were also considered as difficult times.

For the talks to different actors like members of the state apparatus or of youth associations, this introduction sometimes became a door opener; they perceived me like someone who 'knows' about the difficulties of living in Guéckédou – not through Western news but by having lived together. Accordingly, I noted in my Memo:

> Strange. Something changed. I somehow experience greater respect due to mylast stay in Guéckédou. Probably it was good to 'endure', although my Dadis-times were sometimes really difficult.

Observing Practices – My research project on the youth-state nexus follows the circular research methodology from the EEA and does not distinguish between data collection and analysis. Thus the mapping of social actors, the social discourse analysis and the analysis of the respective social practice are perceived as a circular process, which is never completed. Previously collected data frequently gets a new meaning when re-read at a later stage of the research process.

> The well-dressed prefect was quite busy. He was not really in the mood to talk to me. Probably also due to the fact that my voice was quite hoarse… the travel to Guéckédouhas been demanding.

When I was visiting Guinea and the city of Guéckédou for the first time in January 2008, the political circumstances could be characterised as tense, but, as I learnt in the following months, not extraordinary or unusual for the Guinean political theatre around Lansana Conté, then President of the Guinean state.[22] Soon after arriving in

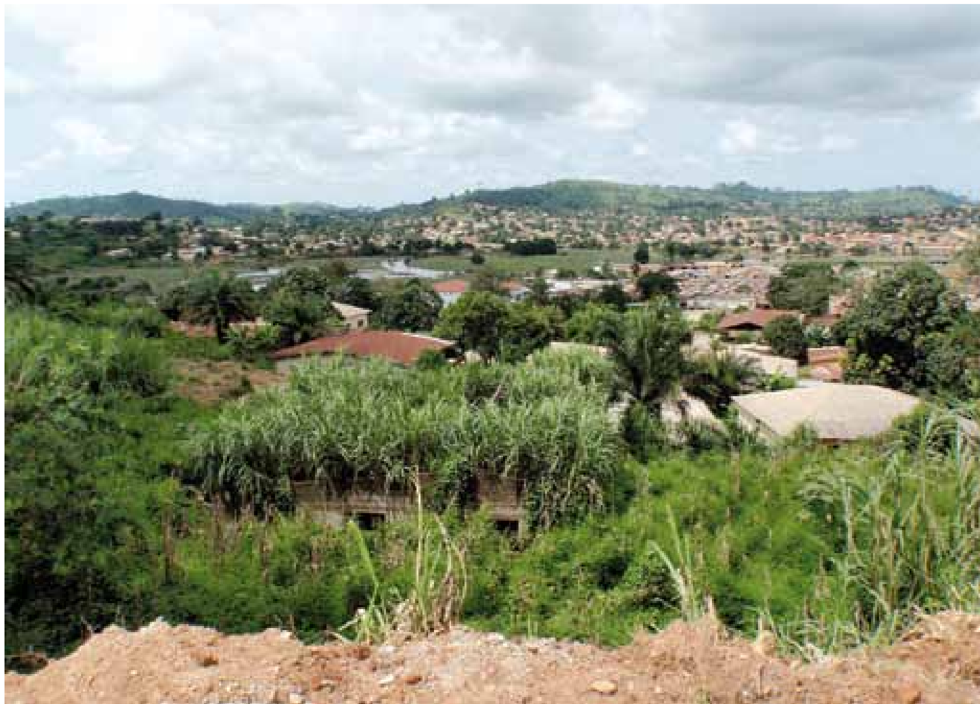
21 On changes of sensory perception during fieldwork, see Stoller 1987, 1989, 1997. See also the introductory essay by Förster, above.

22 The political situation after the general strikes and the social unrests of 2006/2007 can be interpreted as an 'unfinished revolution', see Engeler 2008.

Guéckédou I visited the prefect and got to know a suited man with several mobile phones on his otherwise empty table. While waiting for my turn to speak, he at times even talked on two phones at the same time. I was quite impressed by this performance of a busy civil servant. Finally, I had some minutes to introduce myself, but the prefect had not much time to listen. More than a year later, back for another couple of months of fieldwork, the very same prefect was still in office. This could not be taken for granted; long-term President Lansana Conté was dead and in the meantime a military regime took over – not without changing their machinery of power at the local level. However, when I visited the prefect I met a quite relaxed man in the uniform of a higher-ranking commander. Thus, chameleon-like he perfectly knew which dress was appropriate for what kind of regime. In 2007/2008, politics had been shaped through popular Prime Minister Lansana Kouyaté, who was always dressed in a proper way. In 2009, however, the militaries set the agenda and the prefect cast off his civilian clothes. Months later, after several political intermezzos and a turbulent phase of transition towards presidential elections, the prefect successfully managed to host different political campaigns in town, although ethnic tensions increased. Since December 2010, Guinea has a new president, Alpha Condé, who also leads the RPG (*Rassemblement du Peuple Guinéen*), a strong opposition party during the Lansana Conté-era. The prefect of Guéckédou, however, already became a faithful party member…

Concluding Remarks

This short narrative shows that political transformations on a national level became visible – and observable – in the local arena, and, additionally, that these imageries of the state can change quite quickly. Thus, doing fieldwork during a particular time, it is obvious that one can only grasp a particular time, or, in the words of Sally Falk Moore, the researcher is confronted with "the dilemmas of processual ethnography" (Moore 1987). The observation of the changing clothing practices of a politically successful prefect became, indeed, a marker of process-like data collection and analysis, strongly related to the broader political transformations.



The landscape of Guéckédou, seen from the prefecture.
Photo: Michelle Engeler, 2009

Nevertheless, "there is the landscape we initially see and a second landscape which is produced through local practice and which we come to recognise and understand through fieldwork and through ethnographic description and interpretation" (Hirsch 1995: 2). Thus, the research area becomes what Hirsch (1995: 22) describes as a "cultural process", always in the making through the 'foreground' everyday social life, and the 'background' potential social existence. Thereby, the methodological lens of the EEA allows crucial insights "beyond the surface". By listening to young people's life histories one can grasp how these youngsters give meaning to specific events or explain dimensions of social relations. Intersubjectivity, sharing for instance sorrows and feelings of fear during political crisis can become like 'initiation rituals' into the local community. And the observation of changing clothing practices of a civil servant comments on local facets of political transformations and state imageries. Thus, *petit à petit* one gains insights into the peculiar world of other people's life – or, like Jonathan Spencer puts it, into "the strange world of other people's politics" (Spencer 2007).

The EEA in an Urban, Post-Conflict Setting

Andrea A. Kaufmann

Introduction

Aiming at researching the imageries of the state and how they constitute everyday practice in post-conflict, urban Liberia, the EEA proved to be a helpful approach towards various dimensions on everyday life. Discourse- and practice analysis constitute the two main elements of the EEA, while mapping the actors aims at identifying the variety of actors in their social, ethnic or economic milieus, the dynamics therein, and most importantly: how the social actors relate to one another. Mapping includes the physical environment of social practice, i.e. the spatial dimensions of where the actors live, work, socialise, and which places they avoid and why (cf. Schensul et al. 1999), and for this reason, I started data collection at this angle of the EEA triangle. However, as Förster (above) outlines, to analyse these spaces, more detailed knowledge of the actors, and an in-depth understanding of the lifeworld of the actors and the intricacies they deal with is needed. Throughout my research, I conducted many narrative or semi-structured interviews which were helpful to acquire valuable background and specific information, and to access specific actors. However, interviews only offer partial insights, for they are, firstly, reduced to the spoken word; secondly, information acquired this way is often normative, and thirdly, much of the lifeworldly experience of actors seemed too obvious to talk about. Because of these limitations, the three elements of the EEA were very crucial to complement and embed the data on various dimensions of everyday life, by following various actors, listening to what they say about whom and why, and observe how they act for example when by encountering other persons.

This contribution highlights some challenges of field research in an urban setting characterised by the effects of a recent conflict. Mapping the actors was more tricky than assumed, and it proved to stand for the general challenges of my ethnography: Firstly, parts of the city are difficult to access and overview due to the shape, size, and density, diversity and mobility of its inhabitants; secondly, there is always a certain level of insecurity, as many local actors feel unsafe at night or in certain areas. As researchers in conflict-affected areas experience, insecurity thus is a constraint to the researcher, and certain physical and social spaces remain opaque; and thirdly, the scarcities of the Liberians to some degree were my scarcities too, and I had to learn how to cope with many of these to become more efficient in the everyday life.

Shared Experiences in the Urban Context

Monrovia is situated along the Atlantic seacoast and the Cape Mesurado peninsula; the rivers and swamp forcing the city to squeeze between and around this physical environment. The city centre started from the southern river bench of Cape Mesurado, and expanded to the Southeast towards the Red Light market, and North, over the New Bridge, towards Duala market. The city is bursting out of its seams: Communities have few roads to pass through; apartments are filled with up to 20 persons or more with core and extended family members, including adopted children. The diversity even within a

small community is high: Run down houses and shacks damaged by bullets next to renovated, modern architectures as remainders of the conflict. Much was destroyed, many families have not returned, or simply cannot afford to renovate their homes. Others use the unoccupied space to squat for a while. Similar to other cities in Africa, the number of inhabitants has grown massively in the recent past. Monrovia is expanding in all directions, with people crowding into already crowded compounds and apartments, and new constructions arising beyond the borders of the city.

Because the child was afraid of "the white woman" and started to cry, we all started to laugh. *Photo: Felesu F. Swaray.*

Monrovia presents a challenge for inhabitants, urban planners, policy makers and -implementers, and, needless to say, to my endeavours. In order to participate in Liberian everyday life, I initially had envisaged staying with a family. The conditions of lack of space – as I would have needed a room for myself – made this quite difficult,[23] and after three months of living in a guesthouse in central Monrovia, I decided to rent an apartment in a peri-urban community. "Everybody lives in Red Light!" said a friend, motivating me to move into that lively community when I was about to take a decision to rent the apartment, still hesitating about security issues. So I decided to move into the densely populated community and this way finally managed to experience a bit more closely the daily routines of ordinary Liberians. The way to central Monrovia though became very long. As the road system is not expanding as fast as the city, morning and evening hours are characterised by congested roads into, respectively out of central town and around the commercial areas. Hence, an ordinary trip from peri-urban Monrovia into town could take 20 minutes with low traffic, and up to two hours during rush hours. Having to stand up to an hour in line waiting for a bus made it even more unpredictable. These are challenges that dwellers of other urban environments experience as well. I observed how frustrated police officers attempted to regulate the traffic by whistling, waving and shouting, the road users who appropriate the road in any way; passengers that use the time to discuss marital problems or local politics, and though these situations provided interesting opportunities to observe how local actors deal with such scarcities, I shared the experience of unpredictable situations. I missed appointments with informants, and squeezed in a taxi for two hours in the heat was exhausting. These bodily experiences contributed to a more detailed understanding of the lifeworlds which could not have been accessed by discourses and observations.

Understanding Security and Insecurity

Retrospectively, I forget what blocked my approach to ordinary Liberians during my first weeks of field research: fear. I entered the field seemingly well prepared, 'knowing' that there were thousands of ex-combatants and war criminals hustling about. I had read the reports on the dark past of the country, and was well warned about

23 Other factors such as mutual trust play a role too, and especially trust needs time to develop. As experienced by other contributors in this paper (see Förster or Heer, above), some Liberians told me at a later stage that it was quite odd to them that a foreigner would want to live like ordinary Liberians.

the prevalent high crime-rate of the aftermath. However, with the shared experiences and the better knowledge about the social reality, the more normal it became to me to live with certain facts that ordinary Liberians live with. They have adopted strategies to keep safe, they explained, such as staying home at night, barricading the doors with furniture at night, organising into neighbourhood watch teams, which all made me assume that at night time, it is insecure all over Monrovia. However, one night I passed Duala Market at ten in the night in a car, and found the place as lively as during the daytime (cf. Heitz, below). I started to learn that actors have a normative understanding of security; however, various reasons lead them to act differently. Understanding their notion of security and insecurity in their respective context is important to the understanding of social reality as a whole, which the researcher can learn from long-term observation of and participation in such scenes. But as I did not want to expose myself to risk, I had to reduce data collection on these specific issues to discourses and mere occasional glimpses.

The capital city is a mosaic of secure and insecure places, and the latter are avoided by many Liberians. As these places may exist just next to each other, I had to learn about them. Mamba Point is generally known as a safe part of town with street lights and many gated communities in central Monrovia. But right behind some of the most luxurious compounds and hotels are run down communities, such as South Beach, which are considered unsafe by some local actors as well. Besides South Beach, there are a few local beach bars, visited by tired workers to pause, and idle youth. JR Beach is a place where informal conversations happen easily, where life plans or ideas are aired about while looking into the rough ocean waves. As it was considered an unsafe place and not so "up to standard",[24] it was quite challenging to find someone to accompany me there, and once accompanied, the informal discussions were not uninfluenced anymore. As a researcher, I enjoyed the freedom to cross boundaries – at times to the discomfort of those who accompanied me. However, these experiences revealed again valuable data, connections and ascriptions which I would not have gathered otherwise.

Conceiving the Social Setting and Its Tensions

Participation and hence sharing experiences helped me to understand what I did not when I lived in central Monrovia for the first period of time: So many issues are uncertain and unpredictable for the local actors, even if they have lived under these difficult conditions for a long time. Apart from the above-mentioned traffic problem was the question of where street selling, a quite common economic activity, could take place, whereas at the same time, the Monrovia City Corporation (MCC) aims at cleaning up the city. Daily routines were interrupted, and actors had to reorient themselves. Renovating a street can mean demolishing buildings and constructions, especially the makeshift-shacks and squatted areas, the livelihoods of many Liberians. And the implications: a new challenge to the researcher as all of a sudden whole houses vanish. Many local actors do not understand the work of the MCC, although it is praised by some. For them, it is simply destruction and seems an act of domination by a government that does not have the Liberians at heart. I felt uncomfortable observing such a scene, as there was also a level of violence around it. "Waiting for someone" at a street corner with street sellers was a possibility to grasp a bit of everyday life of street sellers and helped me to understand what is going on from their perspective: not understanding why this is ordered by the government, and hence, for them, it reminded them of narratives of the past:[25] the ruling elite who does not care about the "small man". This example

24 Not only in Liberia do people prefer socialising with members of their own milieu.

25 Street sellers are often young men who have not experienced elite-based rule of the past.

As the city changes its face, the social actors – including me as ethnographer – try to reorient themselves.
Photo: Andrea A. Kaufmann, 2010

highlights a challenge of practice analysis. Observations like scenes of the MCC were not plannable for me, and informants did not always know what is going on. As the city changes its face, the actors therein experience quite a high level of physical and social mobility. For me as a researcher, these changes are interesting, but the negative side of it can be quite depressing, for example the consequences of a person who loses a job. In addition, catching up with them changes is time consuming. For these reasons, I started to sample more selectively (Strauss/Corbin 1990) and focus on a few informants, which I followed in more depth (cf. Marcus 1995).

Like many urban populations, the Monrovian population is quite a heterogeneous setting with more than 16 ethnic groups, various nationalities, religious beliefs and social milieus. Tensions between or among some groups are common, but they are latent. It takes some time and knowledge to discover these issues in the daily activities and the media discourses. Looking into a neighbourhood, one finds communities made up of socially or economically divided groups. Not all neighbourhoods interact with each other so openly. Of course such detailed knowledge cannot be acquired of all neighbourhoods. For example, tensions between the Mandingo and other ethnic groups are quite widespread, and may cause members of the Mandingo ethnic group to switch identity under certain conditions. It needs some time and observations, for example at Hatay Shops, where strong sweet green tea and simple meals are consumed. Consumers are often those who do not receive a cooked meal at home: men and young men of the community, and often travellers. Observations of scenes of people interacting with members of this ethnic group reveal ascriptions towards the latter. Therefore, identification of social settings requires a deeper knowledge that can only be acquired in a long-term analysis of the context. These ascriptions are often heard incidentally, by passing such a shop with someone, for example. But following the actors is not as easy as it sounds. Many are quite busy during the day time, as even a person who is looking for a job is active, is involved in family or small business activities or just "hustling" around, looking for opportunities. I hardly ever met an idle person "just sitting around". Consequences for the conversations or interviews where that these almost always had to

be planned in advance. Even at a less busy moment, the person would have to answer phone calls, make arrangements or meet people. And as soon as the evening comes close, many rush to store their goods and find transportation back home before sunset. Once at home, one sits on the porch and discusses with family members or neighbours.

The neighbourhood I lived in welcomed me and was very friendly, though a bit diffident. Now and then, people revealed their impressions that I must be from the CIA or so, and could not really understand why I would chose a peri-urban neighborhood to stay and what the purpose of my stay really was. It was a more or less middle-class milieu: most people had their own house; one was a teacher, one a bar owner, a shop owner, a pastor, etc., there were two landlords, of which one was my direct neighbour, a deaf man and his fiancée. There were also less economically strong neighbours. Though I shared a certain level of everyday life with them, as going to church, sharing free time and evening conversations, or going out for a drink, a direct living in common was not possible, and intersubjectivity therefore had its constraints. I interacted with socially, culturally and economically different persons, overreaching various tensions. As an example, I learned about present discourses on ethnic tensions, of course, the legacy of the conflict and debates on national identities contributed to these sentiments. Then again, in everyday life, I met the members of the various groups interacting seemingly normally. Discovering in what situation ethnic identity played a role and where not, was not obvious. My own, personal values and norms at times hampered an objective approach on such issues. But in sum, the long-term field work period and experiences gained through various discourses, participation and observations remains crucial to the understanding of these subtleties in the local context.

Concluding Remarks

This contribution aimed at highlighting through selected examples what challenges can occur while conducting ethnographic fieldwork in a post-conflict, urban context. Access to observation and participation was in some realms limited, as some examples showed. I visited informants, spent time with them, and gathered valuable information through informal conversations. But I have not participated or observed some of the major events that turned the lives of many Liberians: the incidents of the conflict. Neither had I experienced the change to the peaceful, reconstruction period. Many incidents and experiences that shaped the agency of the people, their livelihoods, hopes or dreams where only accessible to me through discourses. However, by returning to my informants and following them for a certain time revealed other aspects of their life trajectories. The EEA with its three elements hence proved to be a helpful approach to the various dimensions of social reality. By experiencing scarcities, uncertainties and insecurities over a longer period of field research, by hearing what people say about their concerns and how they interrelate, perspectives began to overlap, and I could comprehend the local realities in more depth.

The EEA in Rapidly Changing (Post–)Conflict Settings

Kerstin Bauer

Introduction

My contribution highlights the challenges and constraints of the EEA in a field site affected by violence. Therefore I draw from empirical research conducted in Côte d'Ivoire in the West African conflict region.[26]

The place of my fieldwork in northern Côte d'Ivoire fell under rebel control after a failed coup d'état in September 2002.[27] After the outbreak of the conflict, the rebel forces seized control over around 55% of the territory whereas the southern part of the country stayed under the rule of the incumbent government. Although state administration and security forces disappeared in the rebel-held part of the country, the new forces were able to establish an own way of governing their territory. Against the background of our general research question of how trust and security are (re-)established in post-conflict society, one focus of my field research was to investigate the political transformations in northern Côte d'Ivoire. Instead of documenting state failure, I was rather interested in the formation and legitimisation of the newly emerging political order and the upcoming local governance arrangements. In order to gain an informed understanding of such processes a prerequisite was to identify social actors and to analyse how the relationships, roles and power balance between the different social actors were transforming from the time before the conflict to the post-conflict situation.[28]

In order to address the challenges and constraints of doing research in rapidly changing (post–)conflict settings I will focus 1) on the mapping of social actors as a circular process, and 2) on cases when participation and intersubjectivity comes to its limits.

Mapping and Practice Analysis in a Conflict-Affected Field Site

The political landscape in the rebel territory was characterised by a parallel presence of diverse actors engaging in the different fields of local governance with the rebels as only one actor amongst others. In a feasibility study (Bauer/Dobler/Förster 2007) the members of the project group started with a first mapping of the social actors on the

26 My research is situated within a larger joint research project on "Regaining trust and civil security after conflict" funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in Côte d'Ivoire before the outbreak of the violent conflict in 2002, and between 2007 and 2009 when the northern part of the country became accessible again. For more information see: http://www.unibas-ethno.ch/forschung/forschungsprojekte/trust.php (accessed 12.09.2011).

27 Since the following is a paper on methodology and due to the restricted space, I include very sparse ethnographical information.

28 A detailed analysis of these processes shall lead to a better understanding of the link between governance and trust in areas of precarious statehood.

ground by applying techniques developed in conflict analysis (Englebert 2000, Kassimir/Latham 2011). This initial description of who is who in the area of research served as a basis for a quantitative survey on the perception of security during the next field stay to compile additional data for a comparison of the different field sites.[29] A standardised questionnaire helped us to gain a broader basis of knowledge on the perception of the armed actors.[30] For this purpose, open-ended questions were complemented by multiple-choice questions. In one multiple-choice question the participants were asked to state whether they feel protected or threatened by a – in the following explicitly named – group. The responses of the open-ended questions and the multiple-choice questions were correlated in order to test the responses. The outcome was a ranking of the perception of the actors (positive – contested – negative) in the different field sites. The results of the quantitative inquiry were then interpreted and contextualised on the basis of data collected by qualitative methods. Thus, the responses deriving from the questionnaires were contrasted with the initial mapping of the social actors which crucially contributed to a refinement and modification of this first draft. For instance, with help of the survey we quickly discovered that some actors groups were named differently, were not present in some places, or perceived as not relevant in guaranteeing security. After having adapted the mapping of the identified social actors engaged in security governance the results were cross-checked and contextualised with the outcomes gained by qualitative methods, as for example by participation and observation. In practice analysis I focused on the interactions of violent and non-violent actors in specific situations. Therefore I asked how they are organised, how they operate in practice, and how they interact and cooperate in the different fields of governance. In discourse analysis I focused on how they articulate political issues and how they are perceived and trusted by the civil population.

As the different social actors are part of specific constellations and interdependencies, defined as figurations by Norbert Elias (1970, 2003), the research asked how they were related to each other and how they were involved in government issues by focussing on the dynamic interrelationship and the changing power balance between them.[31] Changes in a particular figuration may happen very rapidly especially in conflict and post-conflict settings. New actors and institutions emerge whilst pre-existing actors and institutions achieve differently evaluated positions (Bauer/Dobler/Förster 2007). Rulers may be replaced and former partners may become enemies. Soldiers may become rebels, non-state armed actors may transform (more or less successfully) into non-violent political actors and vice versa. Such changes in a figuration may be accompanied by decisive shifts in the power relation in favour of specific social actors and to the disadvantage of others. This also includes transformations of mutual perceptions, attitudes, and practices. In order to document and analyse the transforming constellations and changing power relations, an ongoing actualisation was the key feature of the fieldwork. The research methodology is a circular process and aims at actualising and modifying the mapping of the social actors by contrasting them with social practice and discourse which will be discussed in detail elsewhere in this working paper. In order to investigate such ongoing processes more than only one snap-shot of one given moment

29 See Bauer/Förster/Heitz, 2012 [under review].

30 The quantitative data was collected during field research carried out in Côte d'Ivoire in 2008 and 2009. The questionnaire on the perception of security is based on a survey from the Institute of African Affairs Hamburg for Liberia. Some results of this survey on Liberia are published in Basedau/Mehler/Smith-Höhn 2007 and Mehler/Smith-Höhn 2007.

31 The term figuration draws the attention to the relatedness between actors, the way they are geared towards each other and the interweaving of their actions.

is needed. Thus, the most crucial requirement for such empirical studies is long-term research in the given place.

Challenges and Constraints

While doing research in a post-conflict zone, I faced some particular methodological constraints which have been crucial for my work: 1) the difficulty of sharing specific experiences; 2) mistrust and refused access.

As Förster outlined in his introductory contribution above, the basis of intersubjectivity is the simultaneity of sensory and bodily experiences acquired through shared practices. However, to access the others' consciousness, perspectives, and experiences, is sometime very difficult, especially in post-conflict settings. Let me shortly outline two examples: During my field work in a conflict affected field site, I observed the daily practices people perpetuate since the beginning of the fightings. One such practice was the excessive storage of water in the households. First I didn't pay much attention to this common daily practice. Although people told me that they had suffered from a week-long interruption of water supply during the conflict, I was not able to really understand the practice until I made a similar experience – albeit during a much lesser threatening breakdown – and adopted the practice myself. However, other sensory and bodily experiences stayed inaccessible for me. I realised how different our experiences are, for instance when a sudden bang or gun-shots could be heard: I reacted fundamentally different than local people sharing the situation. In these cases, it was evident that I had not lived through the most violent and precarious phase of the conflict and did not share the experience of witnessing the fightings. Even through participation in their daily life it was not possible to reach simultaneity of these specific sensory and bodily experiences. Nevertheless, I was able to acquire knowledge of their experiences by sharing such moments even if the overlapping of our perspectives stayed partial in this case. Other experiences may be inaccessible for other reasons: Although until today insecurity remains a challenge in the conflict affected field site, a crucial constraint was mistrust. One of the initial challenges researchers face when doing fieldwork in conflict zones is gaining trust of the authorities and the gatekeepers especially in areas governed by rebel forces. The presence of a researcher in a conflict zone raises the suspicion of the authorities. Rebel groups often fear spying as well as journalist's inquiries bringing attention to cases of abuse or injustice. Therefore authorities may prohibit the access to certain areas, people or institutions or refuse giving interviews and information: a situation which I had to experience too.[32]

Accomplishing the first mapping of the social actors on the ground, I learned about a civil rebel institution offering a few services formerly provided by the state administration, for instance guaranteeing that school education would continue. Being a part of the civil branch of rebel governance, the institution was also responsible for economic, social and cultural affairs, the communication between the population and the rulers as well as dispute mediation. The members of this institution were not elected but appointed by the general secretary of the new forces in Bouaké.[33] At the beginning of my fieldwork, it was easy to get some basic information about the functioning of the institution and about its members. When I discovered that the position and the role of the appointed persons were contested and that they were only partially recognised as

32 For more details to the challenges of gaining access to a conflict zone and ethical questions linked to it, see Norman 2009.

33 The members of this institution were civilians with competences and capacities in their respective fields.

(legitimate) representatives of the civil population, I was very much interested in gaining a deeper insight.

During the next field stay, I tried to get access to the institution by the help of one of its members who (formerly) served as an informant. But after having talked to his colleagues, he suddenly explained that they decided to refuse my request to inquire into the institution. They were questioning my reason of being in the town and my hidden agenda. The representatives of the institution were wondering what I am going to do with the collected information, whether I am going to publish it in a newspaper and gain money with it or sell it to the opposite side (the incumbent government). Although I assured them that the data will be used correctly, they denied the access to the location and refused to give me detailed information about their work within the institution (field notes 23.1.2008).

As a consequence, I was not able to participate in their daily work, to observe their interactions and performances in their office, or to conduct expert interviews. In consequence of this refusal, it was more difficult to clarify the relation between normative assumptions and statements about the institution on the one hand and social practice on the other hand (what was told what they do on the one hand, and how their acted and interacted in practice on the other hand). This did not only hamper the evaluation and interpretation of their real power and influence within the given figuration. The refusal also caused a lack of data with regard to the mapping and the practice analysis of the social actors. Since we assume that social practice may reshape how actors identify and evaluate each other, the data could have helped to refine and modify the mapping of social actors.

However, I was nevertheless able to collect data on how certain members acted and interacted in public, and how the local population perceived them. The observations of their practices in public, the participation in public events, as well as the still possible informal conversations revealed that the capacities and influence of each person crucially depended on its individual reputation, status and authority.

Concluding Remarks

In this contribution I was highlighting field experiences I made in a (post-)conflict setting. During my fieldwork in a field site affected by violence I had to learn that intersubjectivity is a matter of degree and must stay partial in some cases. Especially experiences people made in the most violent phases of the armed conflict are sometime hardly accessible because these experiences are not cognitive. The researcher is not able to engage simultaneously in such bodily and sensory experiences and 're-experiences' them by living in common after the fightings.

From a methodological perspective, the following questions should be asked in a next step when working with the EEA in a (post–)conflict setting: How much overlapping of perspectives is possible in the different fields of action in (post–)conflict settings? When does the congruency of perspectives stay partial and for what reasons? Are there fields of action which can be identified (and defined?) by the degree of possible overlapping?

Revealing Subtleties – The EEA in the Study of Power, Security and Trust

Kathrin Heitz

Introduction

The EEA has been described as a methodological approach enabling us to get access to interconnected dimensions of social reality: the realm of discourse and practice. The relationship between the two dimensions figures as a key issue in the EEA. In its first part, this contribution examines what we can learn from the different aspects that the two pillars of the EEA – discursive analysis and the analysis of practice – illuminate. The second part of this contribution focuses on participation and sensory experience as a means to obtain information that otherwise would be inaccessible. In each part, I ask what information I gained that I would hardly have received otherwise.

The empirical examples that build the basis for the following reflections are drawn from my PhD project on trust and security in no-war-no-peace western Côte d'Ivoire.[34] Paraphrasing Eriksen: in the 'small place' of Man, I enquire into the 'large issues' of how – under rebel domination – people manage their life in relation to security and on what grounds they place trust in irregular security providers (Eriksen 2001).

Insights Gained from Divergences between Discourse and Practice Analysis

I began my research by asking people in different neighbourhoods of the town Man what they thought about the security situation. Many said that *vraiment, il n'y a pas de securité* (there is no security). They mentioned burglars and harassments by armed men. When I asked them about concrete cases of burglaries in their neighbourhood, they often had taken place during or right after open warfare had come to an end in 2003. Sometimes it had been more than five years ago and they still said it was unsafe. But how unsafe did they feel? After all, I had met them in their homes. Many of them went out in the morning to go about their businesses. The market was crammed daily and even after night fall, some streets were still populated. If they felt really as insecure as some of them told me, would they act like this?

Obviously, my observations did not correspond to what they said. The question I want to explore here is how we can deal with that. For example, to think that action speaks louder than words and to conclude that what people say is wrong misses the epistemological basis of the EEA. The point is not to replace one piece of information with another. The triangulation of the EEA that sheds light on its object from several perspectives should not be mistaken for a criminal investigation, aiming at detecting 'lies' to obtain greater objectivity. There is no final truth to be found or 'complete' picture to be gained. In a constructivist perspective, each method contributes to the construction of its own data. Consequently, we should not expect congruent results, in the first place.

34 The project "Regaining Trust in Post-Conflict Societies" is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

Trust and one's sense of safety, both have a predicative and reflective dimension and therefore, information from discourse on the one hand and on practice on the other are better conceptualised as complementary (Lamnek 1988: 235-7).

Referring these theoretical insights back to my empirical example concerning people's sense of security meant that I had to dig deeper into the maze of social reality. The apparent divergences raised further questions, for instance concerning negative experiences and the lengthy process of the rebuilding of trust; security versus stability, etc. The divergence revealed to me that trust was still low in its reflexive, emic dimension. Such an approach to divergences between discourse and practice reveals further aspects of social reality, which ultimately add "breadth and depth" to research (Fielding and Fielding 1986: 33).

Grasping Subtleties in a Field of Power: A Case for Participation

In this second part, I provide an example in which I describe how a reflexive way of participation[35] and the instrumental use of our body's sensory experience open up an additional epistemological source. Without entering into the debate about empathy (Förster 2001: 469-470), introspection (Riesman 1977: 2) or auto-ethnography (Anderson 2006) I argue that immersion followed by experience enables us to attain a more profound understanding of the lifeworld of our research subjects (see Förster's contribution above).

Sharing Human Experience: Living in Common

If we are to explain what social anthropology is all about, we might say that it deals with cultural variation and the human condition (Eriksen 2001: 1–2). A large part of my PhD study, I believe, falls under the latter. This is not to say that local characteristics are unimportant in my work, quite the contrary, but cultural particularities may not provide the sole template to explain human action, as some culturalist currents in anthropology have tried to make us think. *Vous êtes forts,* I once said to an 'African' friend after his account of how he struggled to make ends meet as a newlywed. He retorted that 'we' would do the same in such a situation because one had no choice but to endure and cope.[36]

This incident resonates with phenomenologist epistemology of intersubjectivity (see Förster's contribution above), and with existential anthropology (Jackson 2005) that strives to break up cultural determinism. Times in which anthropology had a limited idea of localities with uniform cultures have passed (Appadurai 2008). Lebanese people[37] and missionaries of different origins have been living in Man for decades. Some of them even stayed in the city during its most violent war days. Furthermore, the international staffs of INGOs are also part of this city's post-war sociality. They, too, have made valuable experiences with the military authorities and I included their views and experiences in my research. If we accept that there is nothing essentialist about being

35 The core methodology of anthropology is participant observation; however, the dilemma between the distance which is needed for an observer and the immediacy of acting are difficult to reconcile for which reasons it has been suggested to look at observation and participation as two separate activities (Rabinow 1977, in Förster 2001: 467-8). An often cited advantage of long-term participation is that people familiarise themselves with the researcher and begin to act as usual. For a discussion see Förster in the introductory essay, above.

36 The use of inverted commas means to show that my perspective at the time was trapped in an 'us'-versus-'them'-logic.

37 In the category 'the Lebanese' people of various nationalities are lumped together in Côte d'Ivoire. The ones I know in Man, however, really are of Lebanese origin and also go back to their country of origin at least once a year, if possible.

local or African, then we can make our experience as researchers fruitful for ethnographic enquiries. Such anthropological research "simply looks at human existence in particular situations".[38]

At a baptism with the women's saving association, Man in June 2011.
Photo: Richard Gonty Dan

One might still object that my experience of for instance the security situation cannot be the same as for local people. Quite right! I do not claim that my security experiences are identical with any local residents – far from that. I have different bargaining powers,[39] connections, resources, and knowledge. Identity always has to be taken into consideration. Indeed, my presence altered situations. But to experience that and how situations changed with my appearance was a datum in itself – a very valuable datum about power in social figurations and a piece of information difficult to obtain if not by participation. Often important aspects are non-verbal, meaning that people cannot give us this information in words – neither would we have known how to ask for it.

Participation: Experience Generated New Insights

To immerse myself into the life of a lower middle class family and to participate in their everyday with different degrees allowed me to experience for example when they felt safe and when they were cautious.[40] In a way, by moving into their compound, I too, lived under rebel domination. What power, threat and violence can do to and with you as an actor, reaches another level of understanding with experience. Part of my understanding of what it means to be "an actor and being acted upon" (Jackson 2005: x) developed by having been subject to the power of the rebels. Often it was after such personal experiences that I got a sense and deeper understanding what it was like for others to live in such conditions under their control.

Some prevailing elements that cropped up again and again were issues of power and the use of force and linked to it fear and compliance. I was puzzled that some rebels were much feared by people, but that there seemed to be no stories around that gave good reasons to fear these individuals. First, I considered the possibility that things were so bad that people didn't want to talk to me about it and I tried hard to get 'evidence'. Was the

38 Michael Jackson in a Radio interview: Welch, Denis, 2006, July 1: "This is what it's like", in: NZ Listener, Vol. 204, Issue 3451http://www.listener.co.nz/culture/this-is-what-its-like/ (accessed: 20.08.2011).

39 In a constructivist sense, bargaining powers should not be understood as inherent personal features, but as resources that can be tapped in a social figuration and actualised.

40 Participation may include as diverse activities as to spend time with actors, hang out with or to take a more active role (DeWalt/DeWalt 2002). For my research this meant for instance to have a dress sewn at the market, become part of a saving association or to situationally become part of a figuration of power. An advantage was that with myself I had direct access to my attitude, feelings and intentions.

rebels' reputation and their performance of deterrence so effective that it had led to preemptive obedience and a general level of caution? Or was it that people forgot about the bad stories, but kept the message in order to remain in a condition to act? A thick analysis of these issues would obviously lead too far here. Nevertheless, I obtained one of the pieces in the puzzle by experience that I want to reflect on in the following section.

One day when in Switzerland, I received a phone call by one of the chief rebels. One of the most powerful men in the zone, he is said to give people a black look and to be the one who executes orders for the high commander. I saw young people running away from him in certain situations – just to be on the safe side. On the other hand, I got introduced to him by my Lebanese neighbour and he had only good words for him. Anyway, I was on friendly terms with him, the rebel with the dangerous name. This day, though, he said in an unusually decisive tone, that I should sell him my house – mentioning casually that he was in front of the house in that very moment.

Could I refuse his wish? Would there be uncomfortable consequences when I said no? I caught myself asking such questions, rather than asking myself what I wanted, as I would have done under 'normal' circumstances. I found myself concerned with the question of whether I had a choice at all. He wasn't threatening me, but the fact that he called a second time shortly after had its effect on me. This was not just anybody asking, after all. He has power – power to end problems or to prolong them. If I refused now, would he be there for me and help when I was in need of protection? Only later, I made a step back and was able to give him good reasons why I wanted to keep the house. He understood, dropped the issue faster than I expected and never came back to it again.

As an anthropologist I had learnt my lesson. It was in this context that it occurred to me how power and reputation acted on me – as it had done on my informants. The fact that he was who he was changed the frame. With any other person I would have

After a concert with the local commander's chief of security, Man in March 2009.
Photo: Richard Gonty Dan

asked myself different questions. This experience gave my sense of what I can expect as 'usual' the decisive correction. There was no need for real bad stories. Actor's perceptions and rumours were hard facts enough to produce fear.

Concluding Remarks

Pondering on my fieldwork experience, I think that participation in human lifeworlds contributed considerably to my knowledge about social reality. The sensory experiences I made thanks to participation were of utmost importance: First, I experienced that – during the time studied[41] – life under rebel domination in Man was much more 'ordinary' than one would expect. Secondly, as described, sharing lifeworlds also gave me a feeling of the anxieties that were prevalent in this no-war-no-peace setting.

Moreover, the information that I received by participation seems to share certain particularities. Often they revealed subtleties in human relations or cast a different light – even if subtle – on social realities. Participation helped me to adjust my yardstick of what I can take for granted, of what I can consider normal and appropriate. Even if we want to avoid being normative or moralistic in our writing, our world view, view of man and biographical background shine through. Participation changed the way I looked at things, it helped to get a sense of what is 'everyday' and what exceptional. It allowed to embed things in their broader context and to make proportionate judgements.

Taking the epistemological implications of such an enquiry into consideration, knowledge cannot be isolated from the research experience (Hastrup/Hervik 1994: 1–8). As ethnographers we are radically part of the knowledge we produce[42] – knowledge difficult to receive if not by involvement. Ultimately, the connection between data and the researcher will need to find expression in ethnographic writing (Bruner 1986:9).

41 Man went through a very violent period at the outbreak of the armed confrontation in late 2002.

42 Perhaps more obviously so than in other scientific approaches.

Coda – Participation and Experience as Ethnographic Practice

Till Förster

Doing fieldwork is always a challenge. In particular the first weeks or months have been thoroughly reflected in anthropology.[43] They are seen as the most difficult period of research because there is not yet the familiarity that later often characterises the relationship between the ethnographer and the people among whom he or she lives. The intricacies of the first period of fieldwork in another society and by extension in another daily life with its different routines and habits are a moment of existential dislocation. The ethnographer can no longer rely on acquired habits. Adapting to the habitual social practice of others, their lifeworld is becoming his. This moment of dislocation is often experienced as a loss of control over one's own conduct of life. Many ethnographers later remember this period as a deep existential uncertainty about one's own ability to engage in social relationships and finally to master the task of doing good ethnographic fieldwork. Traces of such dislocations can be found in all five vignettes above, some of them evident, others much more subtle. Barbara Heer's experience of her walk across the beach of Maputo where she felt uneasy about the presence of young men going wild belongs to the latter, while the hold-up is an example for the first. Both, however, may lead to a shift in perspective. The repeated experience of subtle shifts may be as far reaching as an outright break with former habits.

The engagement with others as contemporaries – and not as objects of study – does not only point at the existential, human side of fieldwork but is the key to the more general epistemology of participation. It points both at the fascinating window that opens on the lifeworld of others once the ethnographer gets involved with their everyday life, and at the limits of participation as an ethnographic method. A critical reflection of the EEA must also recognise this latter 'dark' side of participation. The five vignettes, which were all written by experienced ethnographers, should be read as reminders that a reflection of a methodology must not remain silent on its unsolved questions, the possibilities to address them and also the limits of answering them. I will try to take on four of the issues raised in the contributions: Firstly, the limits of sharing experience, which will lead to a short reflection on intersubjectivity. Secondly, one may ask whether it is at all possible to translate pre-predicative experience into language and, by extension, a scholarly text. Another but related question is how and to what degree we will become aware of overlapping lifeworldly perspectives in the interplay of discursive formations and social practices. Last but not least, I will come back to the circular

43 Many prominent anthropologists have written personal accounts of their fieldwork experience, starting with Bronislaw Malinowski's famous introduction to his "Argonauts of the Western Pacific" (Malinowski 1922), his posthumously published "A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Word" (Malinowski 1967) and not ending with post-modernist writings about "The Unspeakable" (Tylor 1987) and the reflection about its future (e.g. Fontana/McGinnis 2003, Zenker 2010). However, the double-sided epistemological traits of ethnographic experience have been the subject of only a few publications in anthropology. A notable exception is the collection of essays written by anthropologists from Cambridge recently published in a special edition of Anthropology Matters (McKenzie/Mohsini 2010).

A women's association in Burundi: Dancing is one of the most intensive forms of shared bodily experience.
Photo: Till Förster, 2011

character of the EEA and how the constant reflection of the relation of its parts affects conjectures and possible findings.

In her vignette, Kerstin Bauer explicitly points at the limits of sharing bodily and sensory experience with others. She rightly states that participation in another's lifeworld does not mean that the ethnographer gets a privileged access to the other's consciousness, perspectives and experiences. There is an epistemological break between the ethnographer's sensory experience and that of others.[44] The ethnographer has no privilege whatsoever; being endowed with the same senses as all human beings, a field-worker has to acquire the perspective on the others' lifeworld as anybody else who participates in the daily life of that society. But that is precisely what also generates a common anthropological background to all who participate in that lifeworldly experience. Living life in common does not merely mean to adopt another's perspective or to

44 In the same strand of thinking, al-Mohammad 2010 argues that it would be a mistake to try to overcome the limits of ethnographic experience. Instead of translating them into methodological problems, we should become more aware of them in how we narrate ethnographic experience.

share another's experience one by one. It means to recognise that one shares one world with others. In her account of doing fieldwork with urban youth in Guéckédou, Guinea, Michelle Engeler describes such moments, for instance when she listens to the radio together with neighbours and friends to capture the latest news about the violence and the military actions in Conakry, the capital of Guinea. The events concerned her as well as the urban youth – and it changed her perception of sounds in the night that might have been relevant to her security as to that of others. The perspectives on the lifeworldly reality were not the same as she would have had other options to escape the military, but they overlapped to a certain degree. In daily conversations, everybody exchanged views and feelings about what could happen and how it could affect them, thus creating a greater congruence of their perspectives. Joking about the issue, as they finally did, was perhaps the culminating point of that congruence – and certainly a moment of relief through which they assured each other that they were still mastering their life; living the same world at the same time.

The lived experience of others is not accessible as such. Such an assumption would be a gross misunderstanding of what the EEA can do. But as Engeler's example (above) shows, the ethnographer experiences lifeworldly reality through an interplay of herself and others – just as any other human being. Consciousness of a lifeworld that is considered as 'natural' by the members of a particular societal milieu never grows out of individual experience only. Right from the beginning, it is constituted by exchange and interaction. Just like any other member of that milieu, the ethnographer listens, sees, tastes, speaks, works, acts in a lifeworld that also belongs to others. A lifeworld is the creation of many, not of a solipsistic individual. By engaging with others, the ethnographer consciously or unconsciously participates in that creation – as any other who lives in that milieu. Both otherness and selfhood are the outcome of intersubjective engagement (Jackson 1998: 11, quoting Husserl).

Obvious examples are rules of reciprocity or normative exchange that an ethnographer almost always has to engage in. Kathrin Heitz in her vignette tells the reader how she unwillingly participated in such an exchange. Being the owner of a house that a powerful rebel leader wanted to have meant that she was subject to his expectations that an ordinary inhabitant of the city should accept such a claim. Undoubtedly, her position was not like that of others who would not have had access to the same discursive strategies, for instance conventions and legal texts. But what is more important here is that Heitz as an ethnographer was a participant in the constitution of one shared lifeworld. Her acts became part of that reality as those of others, and the fact that he finally accepted her refusal to sell the house to him was again a fact of that reality. Revealing is also how she experienced the attempt of the rebel leader to buy her house. Heitz' uneasiness was not exclusively something cognitive; it made her physically experience a lifeworld under rebel domination.

The example shows how revealing participation can be. Becoming aware of something is often mediated through the body. But how, then, is this experience 'translated' into words? As we all know, irritating or even traumatising experiences may remain unconscious and hence under the carpet our colourfully woven ethnographic narratives. The debate lingers between two extreme positions. On the one hand, one may radically reject the possibility to represent the world through verbal propositions. In Ludwig Wittgenstein's words: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (Wittgenstein 1922 [1961: set 7]). On the other hand, postmodernist anthropologists as Stephen Tylor (1987) claimed that bringing such knowledge to the attention of a reader is a question of "evoking" the others' perspective. Ethnography would be a skilful mode of writing, or briefly: an art.

Let us reflect on the rejection of representation first. It is certainly a serious argument, and it is a modest one: It would end all debates about appropriate ethnography. It would mean that ethnography is only possible where the ethnographer reproduces language or, a little more optimistically, if he translates from one language into another.

However, such a position is firmly contradicted by the ethnographic experience. Researchers often witness that bodily and sensory experience becomes conscious and is increasingly becoming the subject of discursive formations. Why should they not try to do what happens every day in the societies that host them? Unsurprisingly, ethnographers usually see a need to express, by whatever means, the lifeworldly reality of others. That language is imperfect and that its meaning only derives from a societal play which informs its use does not inhibit them to write about the lifeworld of others, to produce films or today perhaps a website. One may take this as naïve expressions of their experience, but most of them would agree that they will want, against all epistemological odds, to re-present the lifeworldly reality of another society – they would claim that the 'ethno' in ethnography is a claim to go beyond personal, idiosyncratic experience.
Certainly, this is not a valid argument against Wittgenstein because much more may remain unsaid and would still be excluded from discourse. In addition, it does not address the possible tension between the ethnographer's experience and that of others. What ethnographers see as relevant always grows out of their own experience. The image that they draft of another lifeworld is by necessity their own. It would be a falsification of authorship to attribute it to the others, as the crisis of representation in anthropology has taught us in the 1980s.[45] However, that does not contradict the argument that the other lifeworld has left its traces in the ethnographer's perspective. It was acquired through intersubjective experience. If ethnographers participate in the lifeworld of others, it increasingly becomes theirs – and that is what they can write about.

Let me enter that particular argument a little further. If one assumes that the emergence of overlapping perspectives in simultaneous experience is an intersubjective process in which the researcher increasingly has to engage in, it means that the circular character of the EEA allows to trace how this sedimentation took place. The changing consciousness of the researcher, the shifting awareness of the lifeworldly realities of others would then increasingly inform ethnographic accounts. It is a strong point for long-term fieldwork and for doing fieldwork in small teams. There is no way to distinguish positively between the idiosyncratic elements in an ethnographic account and the others' lifeworld. However, the more ethnographic accounts we read, the easier to capture the particularities of different perspectives. Not all accounts may come from professional anthropologists. Polyphonic ethnographic writing should incorporate as many voices as possible, and the role of the anthropologist is more to bring them together than to judge which perspective is right or wrong (e.g. Paerregaard 2002). The reader then increasingly becomes aware where and how the different perspectives actually overlap.

In her contribution, Andrea Kaufmann describes how her mapping of the actors in post-conflict Monrovia, Liberia, had shifted over time. Her first steps into the field were characterised by little knowledge of who is who in the sprawling city. Who gets along with whom and why was impossible to answer through interviews only. The answers seemed unreliable and contradictory. Constellations and alliances changed quickly, and ethnicity was not a stable factor either. Some actors were proud to display it while others tried to hide it – in particular situations. Meeting points and occasions to exchange ideas were scattered over the cityscape, and what would be a neighbourhood became only visible through repeated exchange with the people living it. The circular procedure of the EEA made Kaufmann to come back to the same people. Despite all uncertainties and insecurities, she increasingly became aware of the more stable lifeworldly realities that shaped their life and of who was who in the lifeworldly settings

45 The literature on the crisis of representation in the social sciences and in anthropology in particular is endless. Two prominent and highly seminal publications may suffice: Clifford/Marcus 1986, Marcus/Fischer 1986.

in which she participated. The EEA is a long-term methodology. It raises awareness on the side of the researcher as on the side of the reader, in particular when practice and discourse differ so obviously.

That brings me back to a point that was already addressed in the introduction to this set of papers, the interplay of discourse and practice. The immediate reaction to this juxtaposition would be that all discourse is social practice and that all social practice is unescapably embedded in discursive formations. Another possible reaction would be to see them as two separate realms that are not interdependent. Such a view is as inappropriate as the first because it ignores that neither can be reproduced without the other. An all-embracing understanding of both as one, however, does not illuminate in depth how discursive formations emerge and transform, for here dislocations emerge out of existing strands of discursive articulation only. This is certainly not a conceptual mistake, but it makes it difficult to capture the specific character of dislocatory moments. The distinction of discourse as intentional articulations towards others and simultaneous practice as shared bodily and sensory experience has, besides its epistemological grounding that I outlined above, a methodological advantage. It draws the ethnographers' attention to gaps and contradictions between the two and hence urges them to become aware of how certain practices increasingly inform discursive formations, i.e. how they turn into intentional articulations. And the reverse also holds true when certain articulations end.

This shift, however, urges us to sharpen the conceptualisation of both, discourse and practice. Of course, I do not mean to say that discourse is not social and that practice is not discursive. But my understanding of the two is narrower. While discourse is based on a particular intentionality, i.e. to outreach to others, practice in the sense I use the term here is embedded in the daily routines that seldom surface in the consciousness of the actors. They are social in the very basic understanding of a lifeworld that is lived in common. There is still a lot of work to do – theoretical as well as conceptual and methodological work on discourse and practice. The EEA is probably the first step toward a more comprehensive understanding what it means to do fieldwork in anthropology and in the social sciences in general. The ethnographic vignettes show that it is a promising approach.

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