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Fieldwork Experiences and Practices in Africa

Nikitta Dede Adjirakor, Oladapo Opeyemi Ajayi, Hanza Diman & Mingqing Yuan

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Nikitta Dede Adjirakor, Oladapo Opeyemi Ajayi, Hanza Diman and Mingqing Yuan, 2021

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University of Bayreuth African Studies Working Papers

The *University of Bayreuth African Studies Working Papers* are published by the Institute of African Studies (IAS), Bayreuth, Germany. The IAS promotes and coordinates African Studies involving scholars from a wide range of academic disciplines covering almost all faculties at the University of Bayreuth. The IAS acts as umbrella organization and has three central units: the Iwalewahaus, the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence, and the Africa Research Center (*Forschungszentrum Afrika*, which is under construction). The IAS coordinates research and teaching as well as the training of junior researchers, cooperates with partners worldwide and facilitates the exchange of information between persons and institutions engaged in research and teaching in or about Africa.

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BIGSAS*works*!

The Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS) was founded in 2007 and funded in the framework of the 'Excellence Initiative' by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the German Council of Science and Humanities (WR). Since January 2019, BIGSAS is part of the Cluster of Excellence "Africa Multiple: Reconfiguring African Studies". BIGSAS offers a multi- and interdisciplinary research environment based upon the expertise of more than 40 Senior Fellows and more than 70 associated members from all over the world. In the focus of this unique structure of creative and innovative training are approximately 80 Junior Fellows from 26 African, American, Asian and European countries.

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With BIGSAS*works*! we aim at offering Junior Fellows at the Graduate School a platform for publishing research-related articles. Each issue focuses on a certain thematic field or theoretical concept and Junior Fellows from any discipline are invited to submit papers. At the same time, BIGSAS*works*! opens a space for Junior Fellows to work jointly on articles towards further publication and to get practical experience of what it means to be an editor.

The name BIGSAS*works*! has various implications. First, it is an abbreviation of "BIGSAS Working Papers!" Secondly, it shows the work of our BIGSAS Work Groups. Thirdly, taking "works" as a verb, it demonstrates the work that BIGSAS Fellows carry out, with BIGSAS*works*! guaranteeing a visible output in addition to doctoral theses.

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Foreword

Fieldwork has become an increasingly contested and debated notion in African studies. Fieldwork has been considered to continue to "other" Africa, perpetuating a die-hard dichotomy between the "field" from where data is collected through relentless "work", on the one hand, and the "processing" of that data in the global north. When I first heard the term "fieldwork" before starting to study, I immediately thought of agriculture and it also seems to be caught in the same pattern of economic and scholarly inequality: Africa is the place from where to extract resources, while the refined production takes place elsewhere. And it is the latter which brings prestige, money and power. Knowledge production seems to be forever split into a binary process linked to the south and north respectively. Furthermore, precisely because of this power imbalance, fieldwork also smacks of colonial, violent categorization of people and cultures, forever objectifying them, fixing them in time and space according to preconceived categories. Accordingly, demands for reflecting upon one's positionality, one's limiting perspective and one's power based on intersecting categories, like gender, race, class, religion, have become louder in the last decades.

Yet, fieldwork has not only been condemned, but continues to play an important role – and for good reasons, as the contributions in this special issue show. Fieldwork implies to immerse oneself into a cultural context which provides an unsettling experience since it questions not only the researcher but the whole human being. Fieldwork demands from the researcher to give up certainties, including those considered most intimate or dear as well as the gross and ill-defined stereotypes. Stripped of all preconceived notions and gradually giving up all expectations, the researcher can but grabble for understanding by carefully listening in, paying attention to the nuances, the said and the unsaid. Hence, from that perspective, the field, consists rather of drifting sand than a firm hermeneutic ground, and is a constant challenge to the researcher's (and often also human being's) categories and positions. How often have I myself carefully planned questions and already had concepts and frameworks of analysis in my head, which my interlocutors would not find relevant, would not have an answer to and who would rather refer me to examples that I did not have a literal and analytical vocabulary for. In my ongoing research on imaginaries of the Indian Ocean in Swahili poetry on Zanzibar, my aim was to tease out oceanic imaginations of far-reaching networks (so much praised in Indian Ocean studies), while the poets I worked with, would rather sing songs in protest against stolen elections, corruption or write love songs. Often casual remarks rather than interviews have helped me to open up new perspectives, which I would have never thought of, but more often than not, also chances to ask just pass by and are never taken. There are rare great moments of also communally shared understanding amidst many moments of hesitation, doubts, failure and stagnation, which typically do not make it into the polished writing afterwards. In addition, moments of embarrassment and shame, where one's difference becomes so conspicuous that one cannot ignore it do not fit the heroic story of constant and undisturbed accumulation of knowledge in harmony with the environment: the observer is also the observed.

The contributions in this issue of BIGSAS works entitled “Fieldwork Experiences and Practices in Africa” by junior fellows from different disciplines like history, anthropology, English and African literature, all experienced in fieldwork, mirror those two aspects, which can ideally enlighten each other, namely the rigid questioning of one’s own positionality and the moments of astonishment, surprise and confusion, which characterize the knowledge production in the field. The latter, the moments of hesitation and newly emerging questions, also holds the promise to correct the former, the petrified hierarchies and fixed categories: For instance, in her reflection on her fieldwork on spoken word performances in Dar es Salaam, Nikitta Dede Adjirakor explores the “vibe,” a fleeting term, captured in casual exclamations by the audience of such performances, as a way to conceptualize the affective quality of the performance; and Hanza Diman finds references to coconut shells as domestic burning material and gendered division of labour not in the written documents of the colonial archive, but in oral narratives in local Togolese languages. Oladapo Ajayi finds his field shifting: coming back to Nigeria to work on the Yoruba popular music genre of Fújì, he finds the urban landscape changed and Afro-beat or Naija-pop challenging the dominance and street-credibility of Fújì, as the genre reflecting Yoruba urban lifeworlds. Fieldwork provides alternative sources beyond the fixed and written record and text, often ignored in literary studies but also history. Apart from Hanza Diman, Oladapo Ajayi and Nikitta Dede Adjirakor, also Mingqing Yuan in her research on representations of China in Kenyan literature and popular culture explore the boundaries of their respective, text-centered disciplines by conducting fieldwork, which offered them with new and surprising sources and voices, which even question the neat definition of disciplines.

Most importantly, while most of the reflections on positionality have (re)produced a dichotomy of the global north and south, the contributions in this issue think through hitherto rather marginalized perspective and positions in the field, namely that of the African scholar doing research at home (see the contribution by Alhassane A. Najoum, Oladapo Ajayi but also Hanza Diman) or in another African context (Nikitta Dede Adjirakor), the Asian literary scholar in Africa (Mingqing Yuan) as well as the female scholar exploring her role as a white German mother in an African context (Anna Madeleine Ayeh), while also taking the German academic context into consideration. The role of being and becoming an academic as well as one’s relation with the often stifling and hierarchical academy, often at odds with other social roles, contexts or simply life, is a topic that runs through all the contributions.

Adopting an intersectional lens, the contributions offer courageously self-critical perspectives, which highlight the moments of failure but also serendipity, thus, in short, the dynamic and constantly negotiable quality of roles and identities, which challenge but also reward the researcher. For Alhassane Najoum, for instance, the return to his home country, Niger, as a researcher from a foreign German institution, made him suspicious: all of the sudden his identity as local Muslim cultural “insider”, which often granted him unique access, was also questioned and put at stake. Far from being merely a form of homecoming, research at home also turns into an experience of alienation. The institution and the Western affiliation seem paramount, so that the researcher is sometimes also able to override boundaries of the everyday persona, so that the man can sit with women or the other way around. And yet, the “private” does not become invisible behind the scholarly role either. Working on divorce, his status as unmarried single became a constant issue of debate and ridicule. In a complementary way, Anna Madeleine Ayeh found herself in a different position returning to the field as a mother with two children, which granted

her new access and creates moments of shared experiences, and solidarity which help to "undo" and bridge differences, as she argues. Even blackness, often treated with a strikingly robust essentialism in new critical literature, becomes flexible: Alhassane Najoum turns "white" in Niger, and Nikitta Dede Adjirakor, who conducted fieldwork as a Ghanaian in Tanzania, is sometimes ignored, as she is not the white researcher, but sometimes also praised, as the "sister" from Ghana, evoking old Panafricanist and socialist bonds of friendship between Ghana and Tanzania. In Mingqing Yuan's reflection upon her fieldwork in Nairobi, which she conducted in search of literary connections between Kenya and China, she highlights how she was constantly and flexibly categorized in terms of local or Western stereotypes of China as well as Chinese stereotypes with regards to her own ethnicity. Her contribution questions the overemphasis on the North-South axis of comparison, while also the simplified picture of China as one country dissolves into the portray of a diverse country including globally connected diaspora in East Africa, which she also struggled to be part of.

I want to conclude by congratulating the junior scholars to this issue of BIGSAS*works*!, which invites us to more critically engage with the dynamics of relations in and of the field beyond established and unquestioned dichotomies.

Prof. Dr. Clarissa Vierke

University of Bayreuth, Germany

Fieldwork Experiences and Practices in Africa

An Introduction

Nikitta Dede Adjirakor, Oladapo Opeyemi Ajayi, Hanza Diman and Mingqing Yuan

1 Introduction

Since the early 1990s, discussions on the relationship between the researcher's self and knowledge production have become prominent in academic discourse, with regular calls to investigate positionality under a reflexive lens (Haraway 1991; Davies 2008). As Clare Madge (1993: 269) summarizes, "the role of the (multiple) 'self', showing how a researcher's positionality (in terms of race, nationality, age, gender, social, economic and intellectual status, sexuality) may influence the 'data' collected and thus the information that becomes coded as knowledge". Positionality as often associated with categories imbedded in identity politics, reveals the intricacies and embeddedness of knowledge production as closely intertwined with power structures. With most discussions on positionality led by white western scholars from the global north, there exists a disparate bias in the perspectives that are put forth, leading to a marginalization of other perspectives. What positions and perspectives might be put forward by scholars from marginalized and underrepresented identities such as African scholars in their home countries or abroad, Asian researchers and womxn scholars? These identity categories are negotiated and dynamically constructed in everyday life and daily practice, visibly highlighted or underplayed in diverse research settings. As the multiple identities of the researcher encounters the field, these identities will overlap, clash or complement each other. As Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991: 1244) reminds us through an intersectional lens, identities are not "essentially separate categories" but rather "intersect to create particular experiences". This suggests that the

researcher is scripted and conceived of in the field through their plural identities. Fieldwork, rather than being a neutral space is impacted by these positions affecting data, methodology, theory-making and the research process itself. This lens of positionality when attached to the viewing and analysis of the research process like with data collection can also result in "pitfalls" (von Oppen 2003: 53). The researcher then has to capitalize on the learned experience for the sake of the ongoing and subsequent fieldwork trips and the entire research process. This suggests that fieldwork is characterized by a quality of improvisation and profoundly produced through experience which demands an affective involvement of the researcher (Malkki 2007). As Sarah Pink (2009: 8) advises, fieldwork is "a reflexive and experiential process through which understanding, knowing and (academic) knowledge are produced". It remains central to the process of knowledge production and the experiences produced through fieldwork influence and inform the research process.

This volume takes as its starting point the assumption that fieldwork offers tremendous insights into the research process and epistemological production for African Studies as a whole. While often viewed as a period of data collection, we argue, that fieldwork also provides perspectives relating to theory-making, methodological considerations and the reconfiguration of boundaries of disciplines. Relating to the latter, while disciplines like anthropology and history have fieldwork and ethnography at their core, others like literature often do not. Yet, fieldwork with its focus on lived experiences and emphasis on place is appealing for literary criticism in orienting a sense of open-ended yet situated praxis, that roots texts in their lived spaces. All of the contributors in this volume are or have at one point been based in Germany i.e., in a global northern institution. This complicates the relationship between researchers in the field and their interlocuters in the global south, as McDowell (1992: 413) warns, "there are real dangers that are inherent in our own position within the powerful institutions of knowledge production". The contributors reflect on their positions in the global north in relation to their work in the global south, their peculiar identities and the possibilities and boundaries created through their disciplines. Focusing on multiple disciplines like anthropology, history, English studies and African literature, the contributors explore a variety of positions emanating from parenting, marriage, race, motherhood, nationality, diaspora, language and religion. Employing multidisciplinary perspectives and lenses that include intersectionality, decolonization and reflexivity, the contributors explore how fieldwork can question, upend and reconfigure the research experience. The volume brings together voices from Asia, Africa and Europe to reflect upon their place in African Studies.

The question of methodology and legitimate data when in the field is taken up by Hanza Diman whose paper contributes to the decentring of Eurocentric methods by joining the methodological debates in the discipline of history. Diman draws from this own field experience to discuss the tensions between recordings and note taking in spontaneous interviews, the choice of passive and active field observation, oral historical accounts and the opportunities and challenges of triangulating diverse historical sources. His paper asserts the important role of field research in history and the importance of oral history in helping to compensate for data gaps and critically engaging with well-established assumptions in current literature on fuelwood in Togo.

Nikitta Dede Adjirakor follows this decolonial perspective to suggest that fieldwork can be a useful tool in reconfiguring African literary studies. Drawing from the positive reception to her Ghanaian nationality in Tanzania, she writes that fieldwork can produce possibilities for relocating Africa in

African studies by centring the lived experiences of interlocutors. Her paper asserts an ethical responsibility of researchers towards their interlocutors to produce knowledge that is collaboratively drawn, seeing the field not only as a site of data extraction but also of theorization and intellectual knowledge production. Her paper also reveals a complicated relationship with her institution based in the west which was received negatively by her interlocutors as a process of re-colonisation.

The role of the institution plays a significant role in the field as Anna Madeleine Ayeh suggests in a different vein through the lens of social anthropology. Ayeh's paper critically uses the theoretical concepts of intersectionality and un/doing differences to reflect upon her experience doing field work with two young children in Benin as well as the structural problems of funding within the institutions for mothers. From her field experience in Benin, as a white non-Muslim mother researching on practices of religious learning and knowing among Muslim women and girls, she finds that shifts in positionings may reinforce or disrupt difference or belonging. For instance, becoming a mother reconfigured her relationships in the field, some unexpectedly. In addition, she also points out that both legal and regulatory stipulations in German academic institutions and current funding schemes do not offer female researchers enough support in mothering and childcare when doing fieldwork abroad, hindering the researchers' engagement in the field accompanied by young children.

Alhassane A. Najoum's paper from the discipline of anthropology traces the influence of the institution differently, vividly describing how his positionality and status varied with different interlocuters and situations with a blurry, delicate and dynamic line between insider and outsider. As a single unmarried young man affiliated with an institution in the global north doing research in Niger about divorce, his gender, age, marital status, personality and place of residence impacted his access to and collection of data and his own living experience. His paper shows the need of going beyond the insider/outsider dichotomy and rather focusing on the intersecting and complex dynamics among different factors and labels, which will generate more methodological rigors in formation of a space of trust.

Mingqing Yuan's brings a perspective not previously considered in any of the articles, and one that is severely underrepresented among scholars of Asian descent in African studies. From her disciplinary background of English literature, she narrates her experience in Nairobi as a Chinese national interacting with both Kenyans and members of the Chinese diaspora. Through the lenses of reflexivity and performativity, she interrogates how categories of identity featured and played out in her relationships with her interlocutors. Her paper recounts regrets, mistakes and missed opportunities to reflect the tensions within negotiating and constructing positionality.

The fluidity and tensions revealed through the dichotomy of insider/outsider perspectives when reflecting upon positionality is explored by Oladapo Ajayi in his paper which traces his experience doing fieldwork on Fuji music in Yoruba and Nigerian urban spaces. Ajayi reflects upon the new opportunities, ideas and positions that emerge through the field, emphasising fieldwork as a profitable exercise for a researcher irrespective of the researcher's disciplinary leanings.

While the decision to publish this issue of BIGSAS*works*! drew from discussions of Junior Fellows working on African literature within the BIGSAS Reading Literary Texts Workgroup, further conversations with Hanza Diman from history prompted the issue's multidisciplinary focus which

expanded to include papers from anthropology. This multidisciplinary focus foregrounds the importance of fieldwork to African Studies as a whole. With the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become even more essential to reflect upon the nature of fieldwork in the research process as travel is halted and engagement with the field takes on changing faces such as virtual meetings with interlocutors. This issue provides original and critical perspectives on fieldwork experiences in relation to Africa and the authors add their voices to this timely debate.

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Using Oral History to Research Fuelwood Energy in Togo

Some Experiences from the Field

Hanza Diman

1 Introduction

One of the main aims of the butanisation program, supported by the Togolese state (Barandao et al. 1992)[1] and operationalised by Shell and Total from the 1980s onwards, was to reduce the centuries-old hegemony of fuelwood (firewood and charcoal), which remains the predominant domestic cooking fuel, especially in urban areas like Lome. The evidence that less than 5% of private domestic energy use in Togo is currently met with liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) represents a failure of the butanisation program, while reinforcing the traditional predominance of firewood and charcoal as a domestic cooking fuel in Lome that began before Togo's independence in 1960 (Système d'Information Energétique du Togo 2009; SOFRECO 2011; M'ba 2014).

This long-established relevance of fuelwood lays the foundation of my ongoing dissertation.[2] For the dissertation, I conducted three fieldworks in the German colonial archives based in Berlin-Lichterfelde, in the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer (ANOM) located in Aix-en-Provence (France) and Archives Nationales du Togo in Lome (Togo) in search for written primary sources that would offer historical insights into the multifarious transformations related to the supply and use of

1 The Togolese state supported this program through tax exemption to Shell and Total in the first half of the 1980s.

2 The thesis is currently entitled "Wood for the Kitchen: Towards a History of the Supply and Use of Fuelwood in Urban Areas of West Africa: The case of Lome (1907-2017)".

fuelwood over the last few decades in Lome. These archival fieldworks revealed that fuelwood has received only marginal attention in the bulk of colonial files. This data paucity substantially limits the potential insights into the situation of fuelwood as a private domestic fuel for cooking in colonial Togo, and Lome in particular. However, some post-independence documents (mostly reports dating back to the 1980s onwards)[3] were found scattered across the premises of various state entities,[4] and non-governmental organisations, which offered some glimpses into the fuelwood issue for the last four decades in Lome. If these documents, for instance, help to trace the beginning of the shift from firewood to charcoal back to the early 1980s (see Barbaud 1980; Bertrand 1987; Thiam 1991), they also generate some narratives that can no longer be taken for granted. In this article, I draw on the above experiences with both colonial and post-independence records and the subsequent arguments for and against an oral history approach to showcase how it has been crucial in helping to compensate for gaps in data, re-adjust and critically engage with some assumptions that are taken for granted in the current literature on fuelwood in Togo, and integrate actors' views into the research project. Triangulating written primary and secondary sources, oral historical interviews, and active and passive field observations has significantly contributed to a better understanding of the fuelwood issue, especially in Lome and other relevant areas of the study, as will be shown with examples throughout the article. The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The first section takes a cursory glance at oral history by briefly emphasising how the approach is appreciated within historical scholarship in a broader sense. The second section presents how the approach has been employed in the field. Some illustrations selected from the findings legitimise the relevance of oral history in the particular case of my research on fuelwood.

2 Insights into Oral History as Research Approach

The aim of this section is not to provide an extensive review of what is already known about oral history given that this task has been admirably performed in the existing works on the subject.[5] However, it is useful to note that the second half of the 20th century marked the gradual re-emergence of oral history as a sophisticated and reliable approach for historical data collection and analysis (Perks & Thomson 2006). Though champions of oral history may all agree on its main feature, i.e. (taped or written) interaction between at least two persons on specific historical happenings, its definition based on the vast existing literature is somewhat more vexing and challenging than one may expect. This is due to the multiple ways that scholars dealt with the term. Consequently, different meanings have been given to the term, varying from one scholar to another (Dillard 2018). With that in mind, Donald Ritchie's definition is, rightly, acknowledged as

3 For instance, Barbaud, Pierre (1980). Mission d'Évaluation des Projets Forestiers Envisagés par le Gouvernement Togolais. Fonds d'Aide et de la Coopération de la République Française. Les Problèmes Forestiers de la République Togolaise. Nogent-sur-Marne, Centre Technique Forestier Tropical ; Bertrand, Alain (1987). Marchés Loméens des Produits Forestiers et Commercialisation des Productions du Projet AFRI, 1ère Partie, Rapport de Synthèse. République du Togo. Office National de Développement et d'Exploitation des Ressources Forestières (ODEF). Nogent-sur-Marne, Centre Technique Forestier Tropical ; M'ba, Djassah (2014). Étude sur les Méthodes de Consommation du Bois-Énergie et de l'Utilisation de Foyers Economiques. Ministère de l'Environnement et des Ressources Forestières. Direction des Ressources Forestières. Lome ; Thiam, Alioune T. (1991). Étude de Marchés des Produits Ligneux au Togo. République Togolaise. Ministère du Développement Rural. Organisation des Nations-Unies pour l'Alimentation et l'Agriculture. Lome.

4 For example, Office de Développement et d'Exploitation des Forêts (ODEF), Direction des Ressources Forestières (DRF) ; Direction Générale de l'Énergie (DGE) Ministere de l'Environment, du Développement Durable et de la Protection de la Nature (MEDDPN).

5 Important works in this regard include Thompson, Paul (2000). The Voice of the Past: Oral History (3rd ed.). Oxford, Oxford University Press. ; Ritchie, Donald A. (2015). Doing Oral History (3rd ed.). New York, Oxford University Press.

one of the most concise and "expansive" meanings given to the concept (ibid.) He notes that oral history gathers "memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews" (Ritchie 2015:1). Further, he clarifies:

> An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives. These interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication, radio or video documentary, museum exhibition, dramatization, or other form of public presentation (ibid.).

Scholars continue to debate where the demarcation line between oral history and oral traditions lies. By framing oral traditions as past accounts orally transmitted from one generation of persons to another, Vansina (1973), one of the pioneering scholars to use the term, notes a clear discrepancy between oral traditions and other oral sources (see Dillard 2018) such as oral history. Vansina's contention that "not all oral sources are oral traditions, but only those which are reported statements-that is, statements that have been transmitted from one person to another through the medium of language" (Vansina 1973: 19) sets the clear boundary between oral history and oral traditions. However, Bailey's work on the transatlantic trade and its subsequent social and economic consequences among Anlo of eastern Ghana reconsiders the tie between both approaches (Bailey 2005; Dillard 2018). One of the points clearly made in Bailey's research as prominently summarised by Dillard (2018: 4) is "the extent to which traumatic events could reflect oral tradition *and* oral history." This view somehow balances the distinction Vansina claimed between oral history and oral traditions.

Furthermore, following its "renaissance" after the Second World war (Perks & Thomson 2006) and its relevance as a qualified historical research tool, oral history triggered epistemological clashes within historical scholarship. On one side, conservative documentary historians of positivist obedience deny any legitimacy and capacity to oral history as an historical research approach (Perks & Thomson 2006). These critiques recall the unreliability of memory and lack of objectivity, among other biases, to delegitimise oral history (Cutler 1970; O'Farrell 1979; Hobsbawm 1995; Summerfield 2004). On the other side, proponents value its strengths in helping unearth a wealth of facets of past events as experienced and recalled by witnesses (Portelli 1981; Thompson 2000; Mbaye 2004). The testimonies from oral historical interactions shed little light on events while informing about the meanings and hidden facets of those events (Portelli 1981). Though this article pays particular attention to these divergent positions, it transcends their epistemic scope by reckoning that the only way to judge the pertinence or illegitimacy of oral history should lie in decentring the debate on this approach from a theoretical and abstract epistemological conflict focus to a more practical one. The article does so by testing the capacity of oral history through two fieldworks conducted from 1 August to 2 October 2015, and 1 February to 1 May 2016 in Togo. The next section sheds light on how I have applied oral history to generate my research data.

3 Clearing the Site

As Ritchie (2015: 1) notes, one of the key requirements of an oral historical interview is its "well-preparation" in advance. This, in fact, merely means that the oral history users should carry out beforehand an in-depth primary and secondary study which in turn will allow them to reflect on potential questions for the interview. Following this recommendation, the preparatory work in this research has consisted of a review of the state of the existing secondary literature on fuelwood in Togo followed by two major archival investigations. In addition to this, two months of preliminary fieldwork have been conducted aimed at deepening the archival data collection in the research area itself and establishing contact with different actors involved in the production, transformation, marketing, and use of fuelwood at the macro (state) and micro (private) levels. The role of research assistants was immensely helpful at this preliminary but crucial stage as they liaised between me and my target groups (namely producers, marketers, and users of fuelwood). This helped to introduce the objectives of my study, to interact with my research partners on the subject, to conduct unrecorded and spontaneous interviews, and to take notes of what was said and could be observed. The unrecorded and spontaneous interviews as deployed in my case appear to be tantamount to what Dillard (2018: 6) refers to as "pre-interview," which help to (re)think about, frame, and reframe the types of questions to pose afterwards. Despite this similarity, my understanding of and experiences of the "unrecorded and spontaneous interviews" go a step beyond Dillard's label. For "pre-interview" as put by Dillard can be construed as a type of preparation conducted by the oral historical interviewer before meeting the person who is going to be interviewed. Should or can a "pre-interview" be recorded? Perhaps yes or maybe not. Dillard does not elaborate further on what she means by "pre-interview" and what it encompasses in practical terms and concrete settings. In contrast to a "pre-interview", an "unrecorded and spontaneous interview" as used and labelled in my case is characterised by its spontaneous nature, thereby assuring its authenticity. The "unrecorded and spontaneous interview" arises during the first interaction between the researcher and the research partner, wherein both discuss the research subject and potential future interviews. In such a condition, recording using any digital devices is out of question whereas taking notes has to be negotiated. One of the striking examples of this kind of interaction has been my first and foremost encounter with, Mr. Sossou (Interview, Lome, 11 September 2015), a former sales manager at the Office de Dévéloppement et d'Exploitation des Forêts (ODEF).[6] The outcomes of the conversation went largely beyond the original aim of our encounter, which was to inform him about my project and my intentions to conduct an interview with him during my second fieldwork in Togo. The insights the former manager gave into ODEFs' fuelwood commercialisation since the 1970s challenged the written documents I accessed before the meeting and helped to reframe some of my research aims, especially the ones related to the state intervention into fuelwood production and commercialisation. I could not record the interaction but the notes I took from this unplanned exchange helped to reformulate some of the questions I discussed afterwards in planned interview settings.

6 ODEF is a Togolese para-statal institution that produces and commercialises wood and related products. The informal conversation with the former sale manager in question took place on 11 September 2015 in ODEF's premises.

4 The Interviewees and the Interviewer in the Interview Settings

Having clarified the field, my next step consisted of properly collecting the oral historical testimonies. Using a qualitative approach, a total of 45 semi-structured interviews (three focus groups and 42 individual interviews, lasting between one and three hours) were conducted with users, producers, traders, transporters of fuelwood as well as unionists and state officials in Lome, Notsé and its outskirts, Tsévié, Atakpamé, and Guérin-Kouka. The interviews were both conducted in Mina, Ewe and French.[7] The group conversations conducted in Bassar have required a translation provided by my research assistants. With the authorisations of my research partners a great share of these interviews could be recorded, whereas in some cases my interlocutors only allowed me to take notes of our discussions.

Besides interviews, field observation (passive and active) is well acknowledged as an important qualitative tool the researcher can deploy to watch and collect data on how social groups act, react, and interact regarding a specific social issue in a particular social context (Hennink et al. 2011). It aims at, as Mays and Pope (1995: 182) note, to "watching and recording what people do and say". The types of observation (participant or non-participant), the social settings and the people, the topic, and the observation tool employed, all may determine the strengths as well as the constraints of the data that emerge from the observation process (Kawulich 2005; Hennink et al. 2011). Building upon the short insight previously given on this approach, observation in this study has consisted of sharing some middays with fuelwood traders at markets or some evenings with users at their courtyards as my interviewees were interested in interacting with me on my research object. My informal sessions with the traders, on the other hand, aimed at assisting them and observing how they interacted with their clients and their market mates. With the users this kind of visit afforded me with first-hand experience of certain practices and allowed me to link those practices with the oral historical narratives that emerged from our more 'formal' interviews. It was not always a passive observation with a researcher taking notes of what was and could be observed, or an active observation (Kawulich 2005; Hennink et al. 2011) through which the researcher participates actively in the observation process. Rather, a combination of the two was used depending on the contexts and the settings. In some instances, like the market, it happened very often that a trader allowed me to participate in the marketing of fuelwood by asking me to serve some clients. In these cases, though my original objective might be to observe the process and the trader-client interaction, I found myself taking an active part in the process. However, some other contexts imposed passivity, to observe and report how the relationships between users and traders, or between traders and traders, were negotiated at markets. Passive and or active participant observation was also conducted with charcoal producers and the degree of my involvement depended mainly on the circumstance. In some cases, I was introduced to the process of charcoal production (see. Photograph 3) whereas in some instances I was asked to experience the transformation of wood into charcoal myself as illustrated on photographs 1& 2.

7 The two languages are spoken respectively in Lome, Notsé and Tsevié.

Photographs 1& 2: Researcher participating in charcoal production in Guerin Kouka

Photographs taken on 17 April 2016 by research assistant who wants to remain anonymous

Photograph 3: Group interview in Guerin Kouka

Photograph taken on 17 April 2016 by research assistant who wants to remain anonymous

On the one hand, the notes compiled from these experiences completed the narratives generated from oral historical interviews; on the other hand, they also expanded the scope of the discourses and shed more light on aspects related to, for instance, the techniques of charcoal production that could not be sufficiently captured during the interviews. Taken together, these experiences somehow perfectly epitomise the strengths of oral history advocated by Portelli (1981: 99) when he contends that oral historical narratives usually illuminate "unknown aspects of known events". The gains from some participant observations helped in many ways to add or restructure some of the questions addressed to my different target groups. This remarkable contribution of field observation (both passive and active) to this research challenges the lack of attention given to this research tool – not to say its full exclusion – within the existing literature on oral history. Therefore, arguing for the inclusion of field observation as a crucial component of oral history seems to be a necessity.

5 The Oral Historical Data, and then what?

Finally, the oral historical data that resulted from both fieldworks have been evaluated and analysed. This, in fact, consisted of (re)reading the field notes as well as listening to the collected interviews, coding, and transcribing them based on the research questions that guided the whole process of field data generation. Since oral historical approach used in this research is embedded in the qualitative approach of collecting data, the analysis of those data needs to follow the existing tenets of analytically dealing with qualitative materials. However, there are no sharply defined "rules" of how a qualitative data should be analysed but rather a set of various approaches available to the researcher (Bryman 2012). These approaches vary from the "grounded theory", to the narrative analysis, and the thematic approach to just mention the three. In the particular case of my research, the wealth of the oral historical data has been analysed using the thematic approach. The rationale of resorting to this approach resided in the fact that my research questions and the outcomes of both literature review and the archival research helped beforehand to organise the semi-structured interviews around some specific themes. While evaluating the interviews and considering the field notes, additional themes related to the research topic had been identified. Given that the data collection itself had been structured around the research questions such as changes regarding the production, marketing, and use for example, the use of the thematic approach to analyse the generated data helped to easily relate directly the respondents' answers to those questions.

Furthermore, using the oral historical approach to generate data and applying the thematic data analysis approach provided substantial gains to this research. Some of these concerned, for instance, practices such as the use of coconut shells as domestic burning materials in Lome in the colonial period and early 1960s as briefly revealed by Mr. Hounfo (Interview, Lome, 15 February 2016) and confirmed by Ms. Avedjignonnou (Interview, Lome, 19 March 2016). The triangulation of this information – captured from the oral historical discussion – with primary and secondary sources helped to note the economic relevance of coconut trees in areas such as Lome in the colonial period and more importantly the usage of dried coconut shells as a crucial complementary domestic burning material to firewood some decades ago. This revelation allows me to argue that the first transition operated by fuelwood users was not the shift from firewood to charcoal but rather from the coconut shells to firewood as the consequence of the decrease of the copra trade from the end of the 1950s onwards. As such, oral history has significantly provided the entry point into an important aspect, so far marginalised, within the discourse on fuelwood transition in Lome. Equally, the use of oral history has also been central to critically explain some well-established assertions such as the role of women as primary actors in the fuelwood marketing realm and in the charcoal making domain, as has been largely taken for granted in the existing documentation on fuelwood in Togo (Thiam 1991; DGE 2007). The oral historical accounts given by the interview partners have helped to readjust and contextualise the gender dynamics within both fields by highlighting some changes that are neglected in the body of studies available on the topic.

6 Conclusion

The use of oral history as a research approach has received broad acceptance among historians. The divergent views pertaining to oral history, though abstract, are extremely valuable and thus deserve as much consideration as possible. However, historians and history students cannot judge the legitimacy or inaccuracy of this approach without testing oral history in a practical fieldwork setting. I comply with the previous observation by employing oral history for fieldwork on my dissertation on fuelwood in Togo, and Lome in particular. Whereas colonial files lack data on fuelwood in Togo, the oral history has helped, for instance, to determine the importance of coconut shells as a burning material in Lome from the colonial period until the late 1950s when there was a significant decline in the copra trade. The use of oral history has also helped generate narratives that challenge accounts found in written documents addressing, for example, Togolese state intervention into the production and commercialisation of fuelwood. Equally, oral historical narratives that emerged from my interactions with charcoal producers, for instance, help nuance the well-established assertion found in the grey literature on fuelwood in Togo and in which women are presented as the primary actors involved in charcoal making. Taken together these few illustrations testify to the capacity and utility of oral history as a valid research approach that historians can rely on as it can be utilised to open new venues for historical investigation, question and nuance some well-established assertions, fill gaps in written sources, and provide extensive explanations for issues that are insufficiently addressed in written documentation. However, when using this approach in field research, historians will only gain benefit from it if they pay serious attention to its weaknesses as revealed by those who vehemently deny legitimacy to oral history.

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Doing Fieldwork while Parenting

Between Methodological Benefits and Institutional Constraints

Anna Madeleine Ayeh

1 With Children in the Field – A Long Her*story

As early as 1987, Joan Cassell helped to deconstruct the iconic image of the lonesome (male) anthropologist setting off to the unknown in Malinowskian spirit in order to describe life in the possibly furthest away corner of the world. She published the edited volume "Children in the Field" (Cassell 1987), a compilation of reflections by anthropologists who had taken their children along to do fieldwork. Ever since, a host of experiences have been shared by academics doing research accompanied by their children,[1] ascribing to them the responsibility of conducting fieldwork while caring for their children (Braukmann et al. 2020). By focusing on accompanied researcher-parents,[2] I explicitly draw the analytical line not between academic parents and non-parents, but between those who travel together with their children – and in doing so, sharing the fieldwork experience with them – and those who embark on their field trips alone. While parents in academia face particular challenges rooted in academic working culture and organizational structure that has been labelled as intrinsically non-harmonizing with parenting in general (Alber 2005), I here wish to highlight the specific challenges as well as gains that come with doing long-term research accompanied by one's children.[3] Further, I centre being a parent because my interlocutors in Benin very often did. Being perceived as a parent had – irrespective of my

[1] I am grateful to PD Dr. Jeannett Martin, who conducted fieldwork with her children in Benin two decades before me, for her insightful comments on this paper. Further, I am indebted to my colleague Sarah Böllinger for sharing her experiences as a researcher-parent in Kenya and discussing this paper with me throughout its writing process.

[2] In the course of this paper, I at times write "accompanied fieldwork" in order to keep things short. In any case, "accompanied fieldwork" in the context of this paper always refers to researchers who travel together with their child(ren), while I acknowledge that there are other forms of accompanied fieldwork, e.g., partners or colleagues travelling together or researchers travelling with assistants or students.

[3] Speaking about the specific challenges of accompanied fieldwork, I am fully aware that parents conducting fieldwork while leaving their children in their home countries a) do not cease to parent while being in the field and b) face particular difficulties on their own part, one of which being the possibly long-term separation from their kids (Farrelly et al. 2014). Their experiences shall not be erased in this paper but put aside for analytical reasons.

interlocutors' divergent positionalities and social roles – a surprisingly consistent effect on how I was perceived and how people interacted with me in Benin. This effect played out in a twofold way. With reference to *motherhood status* on the one hand, being perceived of as a mother meant an upwards shift on the scale of social recognition with all its consequences, i.e. being considered as a full adult (in an age-hierarchical society), as more serious and respectable etc. With regard to *mothering* as a practice and a discourse on the other hand, shared experiences of pregnancy, birthing, and parenting, worries, joys, fears, knowledge etc. that stem from mothering were enacted to create proximity, belonging, and a space of shared enthusiasm and vulnerability. This is already hinting at the different levels and scopes – macro-structural and micro-interactional, public and private – that mothering is salient in and that will occupy us further in this paper.

Joan Cassell describes fieldwork as a "risk of self",[4] a "profound and emotional experience" (1987: 257-258) that leads us to confront our own background, our preconceptions, and eventually our inner selves. In this view, doing fieldwork is much more than one of many elements of anthropological work and career-making, much like teaching, grading student papers, and organizing conference panels. It should be conceptualized as a highly personal, emotional, and consuming practice of the self, and as any existential situation it comes with reflection, introspection, and mental labour. Anthropological field research, then, is a field of academic work that transcends demands, practices, and organizational principles of other aspects of the job: In the field, there is often no closing time, boundaries between the public and the private are oftentimes blurred (e.g., between public, familial and private space or between work and family time), and demands of adaptation and stepping out of one's comfort zone are high (which is feasible for an adult but might be difficult to endure for a toddler). Whereas the university back home in a lot of cases protects the interests of parents through family-friendly policies (e.g., "Familiengerechte Hochschule" at the University of Bayreuth), the field does not know any such schedule. These are just some reasons why the ideal researcher is still imagined single-travelling and, much like a blank page in their notebook, ever ready to engage 24/7 with the life of the field. Accompanied researchers disrupt this normalized image of the single-travelling researcher by moving together with their child(ren) and sometimes co-parents or other family members who provide care for the children. Besides exploring the field and establishing research relationships, researcher-parents engage in the day-to-day care of their children. This leads to a juggling of needs and requires organizational skills and a well-thought-out care arrangement in the field. Yet still, the model of accompanied research is not one of deficiencies. Instead, many researchers stress the methodical and epistemic benefits of doing research accompanied by their children. One's own parenthood is often described as a status change beneficial to the work – even more by those who have entered the same field once without and later accompanied by their own kids and are therefore able to draw comparisons. It seems to be a shared observation that the presence of children simplifies access to the field – seemingly irrespective of whether the researcher actively involves their child(ren) in the process of fieldwork or carefully maintaining boundaries between research and family life. The mere fact of being labelled a parent seems to have a considerable door-opening effect.

[4] Using the term "risk of self", she follows Rosalie Wax (1971), who initially titled her book on anthropological fieldwork "The Risk of Self" before changing it to "Doing Fieldwork: Warnings and Advice".

Not only with regard to accessing the field, accompanied anthropological researching yields great potentials. Children tend to make fieldwork more dialogic, as their presence opens up spaces for exchange about bearing and raising children. Their presence disrupts the binary of observer and observed, because the anthropologist and their children and/or partner, their mutual engagement, housing, transportation, and food will be scrutinized by those around them just like the researcher and their family are getting to know all these aspects about their new, temporal home. Research with family facilitates a reverse of gaze, as it exposes the observer in a configuration of intimate sociality – that to partners and children, as part of a family of one's own. This comes with normativity: The accompanied researcher is interacting with "the field" with all their values, norms, and moralities on board – aspects that the lone travelling anthropologist is imagined to leave at home when embarking on fieldwork in order to manifest a radical openness towards their interlocutors' reasoning, towards the normativity of the field, and towards the logic behind all the practices they travelled to understand. By entering the field with their children, accompanied researchers lose control about just how much they want to open their inner selves towards their interlocutors, entering research relationships from a point of authenticity and assertion of their own social conditioning. The exchange with research partners becomes dialogic when talking about and observing each other's experience of parenting, and feelings of solidarity and a shared political identity as parents may serve as a basis for mutual understanding. Finally, one aspect becomes clear when reading through the literature: Accompanied field research within anthropology is a gendered mode of working. The majority of researchers travelling together with their children are women; fathers conducting research accompanied by their kids are still an exception (Krämer 2020, Funk 2020). It turns out that the general entanglement of care work and paid work for women, and the conflicts that come with it, are translating neatly into the fieldwork context, while men more often than women chose to leave their children in their home countries while conducting fieldwork. The story of long-term research with children is a *her*story*, affecting women at a much larger proportion than their male colleagues.[5] The institutional marginalization of (women) researcher-parents with their particular needs related to long-term fieldwork is thereby directly pointing to the political question of gender equality – a highly virulent and timely question in academia. Recent conferences and new publications as well as the experiences made during the Corona pandemic[6] testify for the heightened need to address this issue.

In this paper, I reflect on my research by exploring how my positioning as a mother informed my work in Benin as well as its institutional framing at the University of Bayreuth, and how it interacted with other categories of positioning. The paper thereby adds to anthropological discourses on knowledge production and to political debates on gender equality within academia.

[5] In Joan Cassell's (1987: 259) edited volume, we find four accounts of men taking their children to the field, all accompanied by their wives to fully take care of the children while even helping their husbands conducting fieldwork and typing fieldnotes. In contemporary accounts, those configurations are rarely to be found, suggesting a more evenly distributed responsibility for wage labour between co-parents and care arrangements that accommodate the careers of both partners.

[6] The effects of the Corona pandemic have been labelled as a rollback to old gender roles (Allmendinger 2020). In the context of academic publishing, the pandemic is described as harmful to women scientists at a large proportion (Kitchener 2020).

Theoretically, I am drawing on:

- intersectionality theory because it centres the question of structural power with regard to multiple entwined positionalities and
- the un/doing differences approach because it offers a helpful theoretical outlook on the making and unmaking of differences in micro-interactions.

2 Researching Muslim Women's Practices of Religious Knowing in Benin

My PhD project focuses on practices of religious learning and knowing among Muslim women and girls in Benin. I travelled two times to Benin to conduct research on this topic: First in 2017 for three months with my then 18 months old child and pregnant with my second child. The second trip of eight months was together with both of them at ages three years and one year. I can compare this experience of accompanied fieldwork to three months of research in Benin as a single-travelling student for my MA research in 2013. During the total of eleven months of fieldwork for the PhD project, I attended classes, group meetings and informal circles of girls' and women's engagement with Islamic knowledge – namely the knowledge of reading and reciting the Quran, and cognizance of Islamic legal and historic sources such as *ḥadīṯ* and *sunna*. Instructed by male scholar authorities, male youth and fellow women alike, Muslim women in Benin know a vast array of different contexts in order to acquire named knowledge and textual skills. They congregate in mosques, school buildings or the yards of their teachers to work in groups ranging from highly formalized school settings to intimate neighbourhood circles. Some gather early in the morning, some in the afternoon, some at night. Modes of knowledge transmission, teaching and learning practices and the atmosphere of the groups differ starkly depending on the age of the learners: Children and youth are taught in Quranic schools with clearly defined learning goals and a hierarchical organization. For women past the age of marriage and first childbirth, the groups are organized more freely and are less hierarchical concerning the relationship between instructor and learners. Here, interactions between teachers and learners are much more dialogic and freer than in the children's groups. Most adult women's groups fulfil solidary functions as well, with members supporting each other in times of sickness, marriage, childbirth, and death. Some organise communal activities during festive seasons, such as joint excursions to villages during the holy month of Ramaḍān in order to educate other women on questions of religious ritual.

Interestingly, there seems to be a life-course related gap in terms of religious learning: Girls normally complete Quranic schools around their age of marriage, resuming their learning some years later when their children have outgrown toddler age. This holds especially true for highly formalized learning settings that women with babies rarely attend. Neighbourhood-based groups, mainly those headed by women, are much more suitable for mothers to visit alongside their small children. Different aspects may explain this: First, a female-headed group makes a women-only space that creates ease for women to breastfeed during the sessions – an act that is deemed inappropriate within a mosque. Also, some groups are more loosely organized in terms of curriculum, making space for the close and flexible engagement small children demand. Another factor is space, with neighbourhood-based groups happening in family closures where smaller

children can easily move around alongside older children in the private realm of the house while their mothers are reading the Quran. In general, though, the first years after marriage and having first children appear to be a phase of intense occupation for women, who are often traders, characterized by high demands in terms of care work and economic activity. Religious learning, I argue, has a specific timing as well as specific life-course related functions: During youth, it is understood to prepare for marriage and parenting, endowing the women with an Islamic morality to make a good wife and mother. After years of procreation, care work and *trouver* ("finding" resources) to provide for the children, women return to the field of religious learning in order to cultivate their own spiritual selves, to attain knowledge to be passed on to one's children,[7] and to enjoy community with other women in a highly gendered social context.

3 On Being White,[8] Woman, Non-Muslim… Mother – Entwined Axes of Positionality and Ways of Theorizing Them

Generally speaking, (anthropological) research is grounded in multiple axes of positionality in the field – that is, of positioning oneself as well as being positioned by others. The researcher's positionality impacts how they "see" and construct the field, how they process information and show up in research relationships. It also informs how people "see" the researcher, what they share with them and where they take them to. Reflecting on positionality, then, is of major importance in order to contextualize research findings (Chiseri-Strater 1996: 119). I do this by drawing on two theoretical approaches, namely intersectionality theory established by Crenshaw (1989), and the un/doing differences approach by West and Fenstermaker (1995) expanded on by Hirschauer (2014).[9] Timely approaches to human differentiation emanate from two shared conceptions:

- that categories of difference are constructed and not given, and that they are made (ir)relevant by actors/agents, and
- that there is multiple membership to various categories of difference that presents as overlapping or entangled.

A considerable number of works on the second aspect revolve around the question of how to imagine this multitude of memberships – e.g., as addition or multiplication, as overlapping circles, road intersections or hybrid new units.[10] Further, different approaches focus on different levels on which differentiation plays out, such as the structural versus the micro-interactional level. Finally, the approaches differ in the scale of empiricism they demand.

[7] This aspect is central to the discourse of the schools' founders, and the argument is often expanded to the question of the future of society in a broad sense. In this view, mothers are understood to be the child's first teacher. Bestowing mothers with an Islamic morality in the sense of the respective founders, they would educate the children to be good Muslims and eventually contribute to a better future for society as a whole.
[8] Racial categories in this paper are spelt with capital intial letters to highlight their constructedness.
[9] While West & Fenstermaker speak of *doing*, Hirschauer has added the dimension of the *undoing* – the ignoring and the making irrelevant – of differences.
[10] For an overview on sociological conceptualizations of multiple belongings see Hirschauer (2014: 175-180).

Intersectional theory focuses on structural positioning, more precisely (and politically) speaking on structural discrimination and privileging. This is no surprise considering its origin: Intersectionality theory stems from the analysis of legal discrimination and yields a stance of political research-activism. In 1989, American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality, inviting us to imagine one's social positioning as crystallizing at an intersection of a number of selected "roads" that represent central categories of discrimination. At the intersection, these categories do not simply add up, but create specific forms of positioning:

> Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination (Crenshaw1989: 149).

While in early intersectional analyses, a triad of categories – gender, race, class – took centre stage, its perspective was subsequently expanded in order to include sexual orientation, (dis)ability, age, and religion. The discussion around which categories to enclose in an intersectional approach is ongoing and has theoretical as well as political saliency, as Judith Butler suggests:

> Theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of colour, sexuality, ethnicity, class and able-bodiedness invariably close with an embarrassed 'etc.' at the end of the list. Through this horizontal trajectory of adjectives, these positions strive to encompass a situated subject, but invariably fail to be complete. This failure, however, is instructive: what political impetus is to be derived from such exasperated 'etc.' that so often occurs at the end of such lines? (Butler 1990: 143).

The discussion around the "etc." that usually follows the list of categories made explicit for intersectional theorizing thereby stands for bigger questions: Which categories are relevant for intersectional theory? Does intersectional theory need a naming (and therefore focusing, or limiting) of categories of analysis? Or should it serve as an open perspective that helps to grasp interwoven – intersecting – dimensions of privileging and discrimination that are per se dynamic and changing? Broadened approaches to intersectionality that circulate today include body, attractiveness or beauty, nationality, social background/family/social networks, health, income, and reproduction/generativity (the latter being important for the context of this paper), analysed as subjugated to a capitalist logic. Degele and Winker (2007: 4-10) suggest to organize an intersectional approach by analysing three levels while stressing the need to study all three levels in their interdependences and co-productions: 1) structure – the capitalist economy that outsources unpaid care and family work in a gendered way and is characterized by unequal distribution of/access to resources based on the categories race, gender, class, body; 2) symbolic representations – the norms, ideologies and representations that confirm the hegemonic status quo by mobilizing various categories of difference, and 3) identities – the creation of difference and belonging through mobilizing various categories in order to find community in an insecure context. The third level put forth by Degele and Winker resonates with Hirschauer's conception of un/doing differences: While intersectionality focuses on structural differentiation and hierarchization as a given, Hirschauer (2014: 181) asks which axes of difference are in force where and when, and which ones are glossed over, ignored, or made irrelevant – by individuals, in interpersonal relations, but also by groups, societies or in certain temporal phases. He is

interested in "ephemeral moment[s] of undecidedness and non-differentiation between the relevance and irrelevance of social differentiations" (ibid.170), on moments of actualization, neutralization, biographic and/or historic cycles or trends (ibid.182). He takes on a praxeological stance on difference, highlighting the importance of *doing* difference and consequently introducing the possibility of an *undoing* – that is a situational dissolving, ignoring, irrelevant-making – of difference in historical, biographical, or interactional moments. Strongly postulating the necessity of approaching the question of difference empirically, Hirschauer proposes to imagine multiple differences not as being simultaneously co-produced (as West & Fenstermaker 1995 argued), but as competing. The interesting question resulting from this approach is, then, whether (and how) people at a particular moment in time tie in with these differences in/through micro-interactions, discourses, biographies, techniques etc. (Hischauer 2014: 183).

I propose to combine these two perspectives because both seem relevant in the analyses of different aspects of difference in this paper and, more broadly, in my research: Intersectionality theory is putting power structures centre stage and therefore presents as indispensable in the analysis of a research configuration like my own, whereby I as a White researcher sent by a White academic institution from the Global North is academically benefitting from the knowledge of Black interlocutors living in a structurally peripherized country in the Global South. Global power structures heavily inform this relation in many aspects. Further, doing fieldwork as a White anthropologist in an African context carries a loaded history: Anthropology was, in its formative period, tightly entwined with the imperial project of colonialism, and – despite ongoing discourses and practices that aim at its decolonization – the discipline has not yet fully stripped itself from researching preliminarily poor, indigenous, and marginalized communities – the "others" –, leading critiques to see it as a way of having the knowledge of disenfranchised people disbursed on the anthropologist's payslip (Arndt 2020). Irrespective of my own intentionality or political aim, this macrostructure remains at the same time underlying and dominant in the context of my research endeavour. While acknowledging these macrostructural power imbalances, Hirschauer's perspective of un/doing differences gives theoretical fodder to many an experience I had with the women I worked with – namely that of my interlocutors glancing over, condoning, ignoring, or openly resisting the expression of differences between us. The shared aspects of mothering were referenced often in everyday interactions that I propose to theoretically frame as moments of *undoing differences.*

4 Amira and I: Expressing Difference and Belonging between Mothers

While researching Quranic schooling in 2013 for my MA thesis, I mingled extensively with youth-aged Quranic teachers, accompanying them through town and to the football court while sharing their youth status. Returning to Benin as a married PhD student with my first child and pregnant with my second, I was considered a fully adult woman and mother, now being addressed by strangers in French as *tata*, aunty. Reflecting upon my experience with child(ren) in my research field, my own motherhood obviously played a role in my relationships, also in those with adult women in the Quranic learning groups. After-lesson conversations among women who shared experiences of childbearing and -raising would quickly slip to topics related to mothering: How are the children doing? What impacts their health? How does one get them to take their malaria

medicine? Many times, I was asked more questions than I asked. A lot of my interlocutor-mothers found it exciting to hear about childbirth practices in Europe – something they had heard a lot of or watched documentaries about. Highly intimate aspects of life swiftly became object of casual talk and joking in the safe space of a shared experience of being woman and mother. I want to illustrate the implications of a shared positioning as a mother using the example of my relationship with Amira – a woman whose race, age group, religious and political affiliation, class/socio-economic situation, and educational background I do not share.

Amira is an elderly woman in her seventies living in the bustling city centre of Parakou in Northern Benin. Having been a market woman for the past decades, she attends the market mosque's women's group. Due to her high age and religious proficiency, Amira is respected by her fellow attendees and is consulted on all kinds of questions concerning the lecture of the Quran. The male teacher at the school regularly draws on her expertise during classes or asks her to speak to the group about "women's issues" such as menstruation that he considers shameful to verbalise himself. She birthed seven children, all of whom are now grown up. During my research, one of her daughters, Maïmouna, gave birth. In the following weeks, Amira took me to her room on several occasions, knowing I was a mother myself. There, we would sit together, Maïmouna with her baby boy curled up on her chest, discussing what to do against sore nipples from breastfeeding, and how to find the newest fabric to wear as a uniform to an outdooring. During these conversations, our communication developed a dialogic dynamic of mutual exchange. Drawing on a shared experience of mothering, the women allowed me into the private space of the bedroom, Maïmouna being at ease with me seeing her topless, all giving in to her new role as supplier-on-demand of breastmilk for her new-born baby, just as I was when coming around with my baby. Momentarily, Amira and her daughter implied my belonging to the in-group of mothers whom sweet and traumatic aspects of birthing and mothering could be shared with. Difference was implied when asking me questions about how giving birth works where I came from. They had heard that all babies came via caesarean "over there" and were keen on hearing my stance on this.

I vividly remember how Amira got to know I was a mother. We attended an outdooring together and as I held the newborn baby and congratulated his mother, I engaged in what in the research area are common patterns of joking[11] – claiming to get married to someone's child or offering one's own child for marriage to someone's child. So, I said: "one day this sweet boy here will marry my daughter." Amira, standing right beside me, was quick to reply: "Ah, he is Black! Can your daughter marry a Black [person]?", to which I responded: "Why not? Apart from that, she is Black herself." From there, the conversation evolved around the question of her father's origin, and, getting to know that he was Ghanaian, Amira exclaimed, excitedly: "Waouh! Then you are one of us!" I was quite surprised about her reaction. Later, I came to interpret Amira's statement as an act of *undoing difference:* Highlighting my mothering a Black child, and kinship alliance with a Black Ghanaian family, Amira chose to momentarily ignore my White European identity, constructing me as "one of them". In this particular instance, Amira mobilized mothering and kinship at the expense of race, religion, nationality, and socioeconomics, in order to undo the many differences that inform our relationship. Bringing intersectionality back in, this situational

[11] Joking relationships are well documented in social scientific African studies. For an analysis of joking relationships in the research region see Schottmann (1998).

undoing of difference (or: creation of belonging) has absolutely no lessening effect on the divergence of our structural positioning – and that not just in terms of race, religion, etc., but even so *within* our shared identity as mothers: My own mothering differed in many ways from that of Amira and many other women in Parakou. I did not have to worry about being able to provide food for my kids. I was able to buy a stack of diapers in a maxi pack instead of buying them piece by piece (or not buying them at all because they are too much of a luxurious product to afford). My children had health insurance from the day they were born. I took them to the poolside in some of Parakou's hotels once in a while to treat them. My mothering is privileged. There are many aspects in mothering that could have been mobilized in order to *do difference* between me and many of my interlocutors. Interestingly enough – apart from the frequent questions about birthing practices in Europe – they were never actually mobilized in this way. Mothering, at all times during my research in Benin, played out as a complex of shared practices, worries, vulnerabilities, and imaginations that created belonging between me and the women I worked with. It was always used to *undo differences*.

5 No Official Trips with Family: Institutional Constraints on Accompanied Researching

While empirically and methodically, my research projects benefitted largely from the presence of my children in the field, the organizational, respectively bureaucratic, context of taking them along posed a number of challenges. I will exemplify these challenges in the following passage by singling out two aspects:

- that of funding the travel and medical costs of my child(ren) and
- that of financing childcare in the field.

These are just two out of many challenges that long-term accompanied fieldwork pose for a researcher which Stolz et al. (2020) in their introductory chapter provide a comprehensive overview of them all. Some of them are a challenge and require organizational creativity and out-of-the-box-thinking while some are existential. Often, they result in a temporal and/or financial disadvantage that can pose a career impediment – especially for women, as I have outlined above. (Unresolved) questions concerning accompanied fieldwork therefore directly touch on broader issues of gender equality and policies aiming at supporting families within academia.

First, the financing of travel and medical costs for my children was unclear over long stretches of time – a fact that generated considerable financial insecurity on my side. Generally speaking, the reimbursement of field trip costs, including costs for accompanying travellers, depends on the funding scheme that the overall project financing is subjected to. In my case – as I was then employed directly by the university (and not, e.g., holding a scholarship or being financed through third-party funds) – the financing of my field trips was subjugated to *Bayerisches Reisekostengesetz* (BayRKG), the Bavarian state law governing official trips of, among others, university members. BayRKG applies to particular groups of people, as the following translation of the legal text shows:

> This law regulates the reimbursement of expenses for official trips and official errands (travel expense reimbursement) of civil servants and judges of the Free State of Bavaria, civil servants of the municipalities, municipal associations and other public corporations, institutions and foundations of public law and those officials delegated to these employers (BayRKG Art. 1 § 1, translation my own).

In consequence, BayRKG is not applicable to people who (have to) travel with the official traveller, but do not qualify as members of the groups mentioned in the wording of the law – such as partners, children or childcaring persons travelling with the researcher. Further, the wording of the law shows that is has been drafted with short-term business trips in mind, leaving some aspects difficult to apply in the context of long-term fieldwork. Consequently, whereas researchers who obtain funding by a different organisation, such as the German Research Association (DFG), may bring the costs for accompanying travellers directly and easily to account, BayRKG doesn't offer any such flexibility. I found myself obliged to cover the travelling and medical costs of one, respectively two, child(ren) travelling with me. With the obviously relatively small salary of an early career researcher, this posed a substantial financial challenge to me. Clearly, a law that would provide for the covering of like costs would have to carefully define the boundary between necessary and unthrifty company of the researcher by family members. This is mainly a question of the children's age as well as the care arrangement in place back home and would have to take the situation of single parents into account – a complex field to draft an equitable legal framework for. It touches on normative and morally charged questions such as: When is a child able to be without their parent for, let's say, six months? Will the answer to this question be different if we speak about a duration of three months, or one year? Can a breastfeeding parent be expected to wean their child in order to leave for fieldwork? Can a partner who would take over the full childcare during the supposed absence of the researching parent be expected to reduce their hours at their job? Would the law provide for a substitution of the then temporally reduced salary of this partner? Important to mention here is that travelling costs for co-travelling children vary immensely depending on their age. While a child below age two travels to Benin for less than 50 Euros, children above age two pay a full (adult) ticket of about 800 Euros. Relating this to the large variety in salary between a PhD student with a research assistant position and a full professor, one starts to imagine how differently the financial load of travelling with one's kids impacts families in such different configurations.

Secondly, organizing childcare during anthropological field research can be an equally tricky and nuanced field to think through. Using my case to exemplify, my graduate school's funding scheme had defined that a caretaker would receive the minimum wage of the research country, that is, Benin. The logic behind this is clear: Researchers are expected to find a suitable person or institution in their location of research and employ them for childcare, just as they do back home. Practically, things can be more complex, with language barriers or divergences in pedagogical practice in place. In my case, the children travelling with me are raised speaking German and Twi while not mastering any language of the area of my research. Consequently, I recruited a Twi speaking family member from Ghana for childcare who, for this task, paused their paid work that had to be substituted, and was in need of travel coverage from Ghana to northern Benin. My partner was, as the co-parent, legally excluded from receiving funding for carrying out childcare. Nevertheless, he was oftentimes around to care for the children, travelling at his own costs while

half pausing, half juggling aside his personal career. I personally know several colleagues who lived the same situation – their partners being there, literally "between the lines" of the forms we have to fill in order to get our expenses covered, without being able to receive compensation for the pausing of their occupation for the benefit of their partner's research projects. In the question of childcare, similar to the aspect of funding of travel costs, a variety of factors are decisive: again, the age of the children, also their language proficiency, the availability of a suitable caretaker, among others. I want to expand on the aspect of normativity here: As Cassell (1987) as well as Pauli (2020) mention, being in the field accompanied by one's children leads to a shift of the role normativity plays in the fieldwork endeavour. While the ideal-type researcher of the anthropological cultural-relativist imagination is stripped of his normative baggage as much as only possible, being in the field with one's children means being in the field with one's normative stances (Haug 2020) – with a position towards e.g., what the role and place of children in a family/community/society is, what boundaries children should experience, if a parent should set them at all, how and in which activities children should be in- or excluded.[12] In field contexts where parenting common sense is perceived to be differing (in some cases radically) from one's own stances, it can be difficult to find a person that one confidently entrusts their children to. In any case, finding a suitable person to care for one's children in a fully unknown place can be a time-consuming endeavour – in a situation where (research) time is tendentially short and precious. With this aspect in mind, it appears even more necessary that co-parents who are ready to take over childcare during their partner's research time become legally eligible to receive financial recompensation. Further, we know that the availability (and, one might add in the context of this paper: the affordability) of reliable quality childcare is decisive for parents' general health as well as their productivity at work (Borgmann et al. 2019; Juncke et al. 2020) – an interplay that gained new scientific as well as political attention during the Corona pandemic that came with the temporal closure of childcare facilities across Europe. Any kind of institutional investment in good childcare should therefore be seen as a direct input towards the productivity and wellbeing of its (parent) staff.

6 Conclusion: Which Place for Researching Parents?

Being perceived as a mother informed my positionality "in the field" positively as my family model corresponded largely to a hegemonic image of family, sexuality, and reproduction in my research context (cf. Pauli 2020). It mobilized generalized images of a parent being a serious and responsible person. It facilitated my access, opened up a shared space of belonging between mothers, thus directly supporting the approach of my project that explicitly focuses on women's life worlds. In many situations during participant observation, casual conversations or interviews, mothering was the ground for my interlocutors to *undo difference*. Reconnecting my example to the theorizing on difference, power and privilege discussed above, categories of difference may

[12] Think of the famous descriptions by Liedloff ([1975] 1989) being astonished about babies in a Venezuelan Yequana community playing with sharp knives and at the edge of abysses without any concern, let alone fear, on their parents' side. Liedloff portrayed Yequana parenting – in a not unproblematic, romanticising manner – as an alternative to a perceived Western parenting style characterized by overprotectiveness, a timely discourse that is being led under the buzzword of "helicopter parenting" in Germany.

produce ambivalent, changing, or even opposite positionings depending on context – resulting in a privileging in one context and marginalization in the other, and all nuances in between, depending on the normativities of like contexts. Axes of difference do not necessarily produce definite positionings in terms of exclusion or inclusion. Rather, positioning is *done* in many small interactions. A shift in positioning (such as becoming a mother) may reinforce or disrupt difference or belonging, allowing people to draw on or withdraw from it.

Within the institutional structure that my work is embedded in, I was quite clearly deferring from the ideal image of a single-travelling PhD student, with legal regulations *doing differences* towards parents who seek to conduct long-term fieldwork accompanied by their children. With access to resources that could cover medical and travel costs of my children as well as adequate childcare being (legally) limited, I encountered a situation that produced insecurity and left me with hours of correspondence that I would have preferred to dedicate to my project. In the end, part of my expenses could be covered due to interpersonal networks of people at the top of academic hierarchies, *Herrschaftswissen.* A structural solution that would provide security for researching parents in the precarized parts of academia is up to now not in sight. The institutional normativity rewarding independence from care responsibilities and the field normativity rewarding parenting status produced diametrically opposed outcomes with regard to my positioning.

Supporting researcher-parents is a way to actively overcome gendered inequality in academia as well disadvantaging young scientists in precarized contracts. Regulations with a possibly high flexibility that will work for a variety of family models, travel plans and researching/parenting configurations are needed – some researchers do brilliant interviews with their kids playing around, others prefer their kids to stay with a care person while they do interviews. Many variables from the child(ren)'s age to their language proficiency, rural or urban research setting, research duration, to mobility play a role. Consequently, a one-fits-all-solution cannot be a feasible goal for efficient support structures. Researchers with experience in accompanied fieldwork are experts on these questions and could be consulted and included in the reworking of regulations.[13] Researching together with one's children enriches anthropologic fieldwork in manifold ways. Returning to Joan Cassell, who called fieldwork a risk of self, she expands further:

> In parenting, we also risk ourselves. […] Children are fragile links between our past and future, fears and hopes. We are doubly at risk, then, when our children are in the field. In attempting to learn and grow, we risk failure and sorrow, our own and theirs. In exposing ourselves, we expose them (Cassell1987: 257-258).

In this quote, two aspects of researching with one's own children are highlighted: First, in taking our children along, we are exposing them to the field reality, whether they want it or not. Speaking with Cassell, it means "risking them" alongside risking ourselves – a situation requiring ethical reflection at its very least. Secondly, it relates field research with parenting more structurally on the basis of its common characteristics: For Cassell, this common characteristic is the risk, but her risk is far different from the risks this paper was thematizing. Both parenting and researching are seen as profound emotional – risky – engagements. I want to take this aspect further by adding

[13] This was one of the steps taken by the Cluster of Excellence "Africa Multiple" at the University of Bayreuth: Following my return from Benin, the Cluster's direction gathered a group of researchers who had conducted fieldwork accompanied by their children, including myself, and included our expertise in the reform process of their travel and childcare funding scheme.

that researching and parenting are closely related by processes of critical reflection, questioning of norms, and a quest to invest in one's ability to form meaningful interpersonal relationships through empathetic communication. Expanding on this, the "risking of self" becomes an epistemic tool to open one's perspective towards people we seek to closely connect to, but are separated from by differences: our children, and our interlocutors.

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The Challenges of Fieldwork “at Home” While Doing a PhD in Germany

"Insider" and "Outsider" Positionalities of a Single Researcher

Alhassane A. Najoum

1 Introduction

How does an African doctoral student in Germany negotiate his "insider" and "outsider" positionalities by researching a Muslim society? This reflexive question could be framed in several other contexts to not only remind ethnographers about addressing the objectivity-subjectivity questions in doing social science research but also the challenges one encounters and the transparent methods of dealing with such. For instance, can an unmarried, single man study divorce without raising suspicion due to his marital status? Can a man research married women without being suspected by their husbands? Can an African researcher, affiliated to a university in the Global North, in a country associated with Christianity, study Muslims in an African country without being accused of being a “black skin, white head” – spy in the service of “white people”? Can a Muslim anthropologist critically study other Muslims without being called a disbeliever? These are some questions directly related to the concepts of “insider” and “outsider” and “studying at home” which will be discussed in this article.

What does “insider” or “outsider” mean? Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries defines the concept of insider as “a person who knows a lot about a group or an organization, because they are part of

it."[1] The same dictionary defines an outsider among others as a "person who is not part of a particular organization or profession."[2] The classic debates in anthropology or qualitative sociology on these positions suppose that they could not be gathered by the same researcher. A researcher can only be one or the other, but each of these positions has advantages and disadvantages in field research (Merriam et al. 2001). This is probably why studies on women or those related to gender in general seem to be undertaken by women more than men. In academia, my observations show that men seem less interested in gender issues because they may qualify as the outsiders of this theme. It is known that women have a deep interest, or they are more likely to orient themselves towards issues considered to be female (Échard et al. 1991). Little is known, however, about men who study subjects considered to be "the preserve" of women. The implications of sex, gender, marital status and place of residence of anthropologists in interaction with their research participants' gender, marital status and positionality in a heterogeneous global world order have not received much scholarly attention, not only on the impact of these positionalities on the relationships they establish with their informants but also, to the methodological challenges that it poses.

Drawing from my ethnographic research experiences on conjugal alliances and breakdowns in Niamey, which was part of my PhD project, I show, in this article, how a researcher can be both an insider and outsider in the study population. The focus of the paper is how to negotiate one's gender, marital status and place of residence while doing ethnographic research. In doing so, the article thus goes beyond the question of gender and marital status to also explore the questions of power and reflexivity of anthropologists who study their "own" society, their "own" culture (insider) vis-à-vis the challenges that they live and study outside their cultural boundaries (outsider). The article also elucidates the challenges encountered during data collection, to show how, in the midst of these positions and challenges, the author negotiates many complexities with or without success. It shows how the author's personality and his own status are linked in different ways to the field research process and how he was accepted or shut out by his informants, despite the fact that he is of the same nationality, speaks the same language, has the same accent and skin color as his informants.

The article first provides a brief overview of how data is collected in anthropology, followed by a section that deals with questions of the relationship between researcher and research participants. Being a single Nigerien man, I was considered by many of my research participants as someone who differs from an ordinary Nigerien. In the third and fourth sections, I discuss the advantages and disadvantages of some of the statuses I carried, such as marital status and that of a doctoral student based at a university in Germany, in the context of the social environment of my study. The fifth section of this article is centered on questions of ethics posed by my informants, to measure the degree of my "loyalty" to my society of origin (Niger) vis-à-vis my "integration" into my place of residence (Germany).

[1] https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/insider?q=insider, last accessed on November 1, 2019.
[2] https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/outsider?q=outsider, last accessed on November 1, 2019.

2 Fieldwork Encounters

The question of a researcher's relationships to the field (in forms of practical, ethical and emotional dimensions) is not only a question of academic exercise but also an important way of life or of contact with informants. In this relationship, the researcher can face challenges linked to identity, ethics or even freedom of criticism (Legrand & Gutron 2016). Apart from the personality, sex, gender, worldview and personal experiences of a researcher – which can influence their research work (Sepp 2012) – in field research, the role and position of the anthropologist varies from place to place, from person to person, from context to context, etc. (Frauenfelder et al. 2018). Thus, the way of interacting with respondents can constantly change. In order to build or maintain cordial relations, the rules of the game between researchers and their informants are constantly defined and redefined (Wax [1971] 1986). In social anthropology, one of the best means which enables researchers to collect data is to reconcile their status, to reconcile both proximity and distance, thus, to find a "trick", even a "tricker" or "finesse" to deal with difficult situations in the field (Diawara et al. 2006). Therefore, recent debates on the concepts of insider and outsider show that there is an inherent complexity in each of the statuses and/or personality that a researcher might have. As a result, the boundaries between researcher's positions are not clearly defined or delimited. There is back and forth and a certain fluidity between these statuses (Merriam et al. 2001).

Nevertheless, the degree of researchers' participation or acceptance by the informants can depend on their origins, culture, belief, etc. as compared to those of the informants. Ayimpam et al. (2014) have shown that one of the first challenges in field work is intercultural tension, which researchers are not only supposed to be aware of but also be capable of resolving it by managing relationships through distance and proximity in their daily interactions with informants as much as possible. The degree of complexity in managing these relationships may depend on how the researcher's position is viewed as insider or outsider by the research participants (Lichterman 2017; Benelli 2011). Regardless of whether the researcher hails from the study society or not, an in-depth field research requires a serious and constructive organization including linguistic, social, political, and economic aspects. To do this, it is essential to create a large circle of research participants who can become collaborators or coworkers (Spittler 2006). Most of the existing literature dealing with the challenges of fieldwork neglects the gender relationship between the researcher and respondents. The little literature explicitly scrutinizing gender relations during fieldwork are generally written by female researchers. This contribution aims to show how, in addition to the researcher's gender or origin in relation to the respondents, age and marital status positively or negatively influence the relationship between researchers and informants. It also aims to show that researchers may well be insider and outsider of their study population because they are local by birth but dwelling abroad.

The research on which this article is based on was conducted in Niamey, the capital of Niger between 2016 and 2018 as part of a PhD project in social anthropology. The main research sites were institutions involved in conjugal alliances and breakdowns, specifically families, religious organizations and state agencies. This article is based on my personal experiences as a researcher, which would not have been possible without the data collection techniques I used which was participant observation complemented by interviews and discussions. These observations and

conversations were carried out with (un)married and divorced women and men, their parents and other important actors in the field of conjugal breakdowns and divorce.

3 "Doing Fieldwork Means Getting Married": Challenges Related to Marital Status

In Niger, as in many other places in Africa and elsewhere, there are social pressures on both women and men related to marriage and/or living as a couple, as well as singles or without partners. Parents at home, colleagues at work, and friends during hours of outdoor relaxation often tease and joke about single people. By reminding one that he or she has aged is a way of mocking one's marital status, specifically singlehood. Psychological management of pressure in the form of a reminder, is certainly not without consequences for the collection and production of knowledge. Marriage which is synonymous with adulthood for Nigeriens is strongly linked to religious and social status of people (Masquelier & Soares 2016). Thus, my colleagues, friends, and research participants repeatedly commented on my marital status during the fieldwork. Higher status or social prestige and availability of a marriageable partner are among other reasons that people (colleagues, friends, relatives, etc.) used to refute any personal reasons I may have for not being married at my age. For example, it was recurrent that colleagues and friends told me in Hausa: "*A gaida mantala!*" when I was leaving them after our tea-time talks, which means "*Say hello to the mattress*". They said that to mock me for sleeping alone. Ordinarily, they would tell a married man to greet "madam" when he goes home. The fact that they say "mattress" instead of "madam" comes from the fact that I am single. Unlike in the context of the Global North where premarital intimacy is seemingly not a "big deal", in Niger, it is frowned upon because it is viewed as a contravention of the social norms.

Others use the famous expression of the French humanist writer François Rabelais (1532: 42), "*Science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'âme*"[3] to remind people like me of the moral obligation to marry and start a family. In doing so, one could take advantage of the knowledge acquired in the science of culture. However, this type of reminder does not happen only in Niamey. Back in Bayreuth, Germany, several African doctoral colleagues (men and women) often said to me "*Le terrain, c'est le mariage*",[4] when I was preparing to go to the fieldwork for collecting data and or when I was back. The fact that PhD students living in Europe or even lecturers in cultural sciences have affirmed this, may come from the fact that they were socialized in the same context or in a context similar to the one where I conducted my empirical research. In the eyes of some of them, not being married at this level (Nigerien, PhD student in Europe) can be considered "catastrophic" to use the term of a young African who began his doctoral studies in Germany. Marriage is undeniably important in Muslim, Christian, or other societies. The objective of this article is far from wanting to call this into question, but it is about how that can be an important aspect of knowledge generation for a man, a woman or other who decides to study marriage and/or divorce while being single.

[3] "Science without conscience is only ruin of the soul" (my translation).
[4] "Doing fieldwork means getting married".

In Niamey as in Bayreuth, my informants or my colleagues often asked me the same question: "Why did you choose to work on divorce when you are not even married?" They, therefore, regarded me as an outsider of issues related to marriage. Some even laughed at the thought that I, as an outsider of the matters of marriage, would choose to study divorce. I constantly reflected on this experience, reformulating the question to myself: why do I have to be married or divorced before studying marital issues? And I often told myself that the fact that I was single (outsider) would allow me to have more distance and methodological neutrality than if I was already married or divorced (insider). Even more interesting, is that, to push me or encourage me to get married (to be the insider of the matrimonial questions), they often talk to me only about the benefits related to marriage and rarely about its challenges. Although it is both the advantages and especially the challenges of marriage that make Muslims to consider it as an act of worship (*ibada*).[5] All these experiences of the field are not limited to my relatives, friends and me, but extend also to some of my informants whom I know because of my research.

4 A Researcher Seen as a Potential Contender

I have spent a lot of time in institutions (Islamic, state, and judicial) with persons involved in the process of marital alliances and breakdowns in Niamey. During the participant observation within these places, good relations were maintained with not only employees (who are sometimes themselves in marital conflicts, divorced or repudiated) but also with the users of these institutions. Some of the informants explicitly proposed marriage to me. For example, I developed and nurtured cordial relationships with legal officers (men and/or women) working in a magistrates' court where I did participant observation. Some of them, who call me "Mr. Ach so",[6] have explicitly proposed marriage to me. "If you like her, we will arrange everything for you before you go back to Germany" is the statement they often made to me. The women they had in mind were often young and beautiful women who, according to them, had several "candidates" or suitors whom they had rejected. The reason for rejection, according to my matchmakers, was that the suitors did not display the mentality or "the spirit of whites" with regard to their relationship ideals. Since I study in Germany, I was then a "*prêt-à-porter*" in the eyes of some, and a "ready-made" in the eyes of others. That means a "ready guy" for marriage who is certainly Nigerien and "black" but who is considered as "white". The marriage-match proposal first stems from the fact that we are all single of marriageable age. But it also comes from the fact that they consider me, on the one hand, as someone with outsider psychology or whose social essence is partly formatted by social anthropology and/or life in Europe, and biologically (age) and financially ready for marriage. On the other hand, it comes from the relationship between spouses in Niger which some women sometimes consider as asymmetrical because they are influenced by certain aspects of contemporary couple's relationships in Europe – for instance monogamic marriage- which they consider positive. Nevertheless, this perception is not only observed among people with university degrees (employees of judicial institutions) or among young singles but also women who experienced marital breakdowns and divorced female informants with lower educational

[5] http://www.islamophile.org/spip/Le-mariage-un-acte-d-adoration.html, last accessed on December 1, 2019.
[6] My recurrence of saying "Ach so (akh so)", German terms which mean "Oh I see!", when I understood an explanation made by informants, let some of them start calling me Mr. "Ach so".

qualifications – compared to the magistrate courts employees – see me as a potential contender for their (re)marriage.

Béatrice Lecestre-Rollier (2011), working in Morocco, a country with a Muslim majority like Niger, noticed that she was positioned by her respondents as more masculine than feminine. Despite the fact that she is a woman, she had access to information mainly from men who have the rank of head of the family and who welcome foreigners. She claims that the women themselves sent her back to men. According to her, there were several factors at play, that led to this outcome: firstly, her educational status, being considered as "*lettrée manipulant le stylo et le calepin*"[7] and secondly, her being "white" and French, was perceived by her informants as a representative of the ex-colonial power. But the fact that she is a woman was also an asset that allowed her, more easily than a man, to participate in women's activities, observe their rituals, and share the intimacy of homes. Thus, the fact that she is French and educated has enabled her to have access to men's public spaces, to the "dominant spaces". And the fact that she is female has given her access to women's private spaces. However, she affirms:

> *La réciproque n'est pas vraie : un chercheur homme, dans un univers social sexuellement ségrégué, n'a pas ainsi accès au monde des femmes* [...]. *Alors qu'un chercheur homme, s'il peut sans doute jouer des attributs locaux de la féminité, ne peut en revanche pénétrer les lieux féminins en raison de son sexe dominant, donc menaçant* (Lecestre-Rollier 2011: 147).[8]

The fact that I was a man did not prevent me from having access to even sensitive information from women and sometimes their intimate places, and the fact that I am single and a doctoral student in Europe has contributed to this. Furthermore, if my presence with (un)married women was seen as a threat, it came mainly from the side of men, in whose eyes I could be a potential rival.

At the beginning of data collection, it was easier for me to be in contact with men compared to women, especially when the latter were married. As a man, it was more difficult to be in regular contact for a thorough investigation with a prohibited and married woman than with an unmarried one. So, my argument is that access to the space and/or information of women depends on their marital status and the relationship that the researcher was able to develop with them. However, a married woman can also tell a male researcher the reasons for her marriage and/or marital conflict. Many women have accepted to tell me their secrets, their fears and conflicts, despite their status as married women. What sets them apart from others is often the time it took me to be able to build trust with them and/or their spouses. However, it should be noted that those divorce applicants, who were "tired of living with (their) spouses" for various reasons, were more available, more discursive, and more expressive than those who were repudiated and sought reconciliation with their husbands. Furthermore, compared to men, women who agreed to tell me about their marital experiences were more open, whether they were married or not. This means that access to men's spaces does not always guarantee access to their thorough and in-depth information. In this case, my identity (sex, gender, age, personality) contributed positively to my

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[7] "An educated person wielding a pen and a notebook" (my translation).

[8] "The converse is not true: a man researcher, in a sexually segregated social universe, thus does not have access to the world of women [...] While a male researcher, if he can undoubtedly play local attributes of femininity, on the other hand, cannot penetrate feminine places because of his dominant and therefore threatening sex"(my translation).

building of trust with women informants. Thus, for an African or Nigerien student studying in Europe and with the "*Nasaru*"[9] can create advantages during fieldwork in Niger. However, this is not without drawbacks. Wheareas some considered me as a potential candidate for (re)marriage, others saw me implicitly or explicitly as a spy in the service of Westerners.

5 "Black Skin, White Head": A Misunderstood Researcher?

Another challenge of research in the field was linked to my status as a doctoral student studying in Europe, among the "whites" who are "infidels" in the eyes of some. When searching for couples with marital conflicts in Niamey, I met three sisters who were repudiated and lived with their parents. They agreed to share their stories before, during and after their marriages. The first interview was hitch-free. However, when I met them for our second interview, they told me that we could not continue because their mother categorically prohibited them from being interviewed again. To explain the reasons, one of them told me:

> *Wallahi*,[10] yesterday when you left, Hajiya [their mother] asked us who you are, where you are from and what you are looking for. When we told her everything about you, that you are a student studying in Germany and that you are doing research on marital breakdowns, she ordered us not to tell you anything more. Because she thinks that you are doing this research in the service of the "*Nasaru*"[Westerners]. And so, thanks to you they will know the secret of Muslims. She told us that if we kept telling you more about our married lives, she would never forgive us. She told us: 'To tell this student the problems of our society, is to reveal our secret to the unbelievers. It is helping them to know the problems of Muslims." (Dar assalam, Niamey, July 15, 2016).

The part of the interview that seems to me the most important is this: "*telling this student about the problems in our society is revealing our secret to the infidels*." Different to what some experts in qualitative methodology may think, this mother's reaction and forbidding her children from further interviews with me does not come from the fact that the subject of my research was poorly presented. It also does not come from the fact that the young ladies did not understand the purpose of my research or that they did not want to be interviewed. Rather, it comes from the fact that their mother thinks that I am an outsider or a sort of Trojan horse, present and working not only in her house which is part of Muslim society, but in the service of the "infidels". For her, letting me continue the research in their home or in the society is similar to consciously letting malicious and intrusive computer software enter one's own personal computer. Something that pushes parents to tell their children that they would never forgive them, if they do this or that against their wills, is very serious and indisputable in Niger, since it could even be a threat of a parental curse. If this mother threatens her children to such a degree, it is because she sees me as an insider who has become an outsider and would look for ways to sell or divulge their secrets somewhere despite the guarantee of anonymity which, for her, seems to be less important, compared to what I would have as information concerning, not one or three people but an entire society, an entire

[9] Plural form of *Nasara* in Hausa, which means "European," or by extension "Western."
[10] Arabic for "I swear to God/Allah." The expression is used to give a statement more emphasis. It positions the speaker as a righteous Muslim saying the truth.

culture. Furthermore, what is important to note is that this type of challenge has been encountered across marital homes and with people of different levels of education and statuses. In other words, the same challenge has been encountered with people who have university degrees and working at the judicial institutions. At the High Court of Niamey, some of the key informants I met in their offices decided to stop the exchange of information or to grant me interviews. For example, one of the important informants from this Court – a head of service – accepted to support me, but when she learned that I study in Europe she told me: “I do not trust these people [Europeans or Westerners, in general]. You know? They show us that they love us, but they do not.” (High Court, Niamey, April 19, 2017).

Unlike the mother of three repudiated women, mentioned above, this head of service of the High Court talks about love. She says, speaking of Westerners in general, “they show us that they love us, but they do not.” When I asked her in the rest of our discussion why she said this, she mentioned the “bi- or multilateral aid” of what she calls the “TFP” (technical and financial partners) that Western countries very often give to African countries which they consider as poor. By doing so, she is trying to show to me that she knows how the global system works. Although she did not say so explicitly in our discussion, we can also link to this aid, the scholarships (North-South) that Africans like me receive from university exchange organizations of European countries. So, the help she is talking about could concern me directly since in her words she uses the inclusive personal pronoun *us*, when there were only two of us in her office. She includes me because I may be from Niger (a recipient and “victim” country), and I am a Nigerien like her. She simultaneously includes me because I study in Germany, one of the places where the aid comes from. But for her, receiving help or financial support is not enough to trust those countries and, in turn, people who work and are financed by them like me. Her argument then fits directly into a political and perhaps pan-African agenda, but the elements that push her not to want to continue cooperating seem to me to go beyond the purely political or financial aspect to be also religious. And this is the common point that she shares with the mother mentioned above. I tried as much as possible during my various meetings with her to change her mind, to have more possibilities of interactions with her but without success. However, she was one of the key informants who have a lot of experience at the Court. In front of my informants – skeptical or not – I never hesitated to make them understand who I was, what the main objective of my research was, and who could benefit from the results of this research. However, that was not enough to gain the trust of some key persons like her.

The persons who see me as an insider who has become an outsider in the service of the *Nasaru* are both women and men. But the latter often express that in a more indirect and implicit way. This often prompted me to think about questions of ethics and professional conduct. Should I continue to give (apparently sensitive) information about me to my interviewees or not? In addition to these challenges, an insider researcher who is living in Europe for several years has a risk of being considered as outsider by these informants. Therefore, living in Europe is not always seen as an opportunity for success or prestige. For some of my Muslim informants, it is a risk of “perdition”, of forgetting one’s “origins” or “values”, and of becoming a bigger threat from outside than the actual “Westerners”. The typical question some of my informants who doubted my Nigerieeness vis-à-vis my Westerness asked in order to measure my insider/outsider levels was specifically related to Muslim religious practices. Some asked me: “Do you still pray?” The fact that they use prayer as their insider/outsider evaluation tool is interesting. Prayer is a daily ritual of

public performance that is easy to observe among the five pillars of Islam. Some informants think that whoever keeps praying, remains an insider of the study population despite all other odds. Even more interesting to me is the use of the adverb of the time (still) in their question. The adverb shows that they assume that the time I have spent outside Niger, especially in a Western society, where public display of Muslim religious practices, particularly ritual practices such as prayer, are not publicly encouraged, is enough to influence me to abandon it. So, the adverb of time is therefore used to measure how much I remain the insider or how much I become the outsider of my study population. In their eyes, the gap between these two positions begins or widens when one stops praying, drinks alcohol and/or eats pork. It is up to the anthropologists in Muslim sub-Saharan Africa who find themselves in this type of situation to find a balance allowing them to conduct their research well.

6 Conclusion

By playing on different registers relating to local definitions and attributes of gender, anthropologists have a panoply of techniques and methodological approaches allowing them to have access to the data or information they seek regardless of gender, belief, and skin or eye colors. The challenges one may face depends not only on the local attributes of masculinity or femininity, but also on where one comes from and by whom one is funded, etc. The question of gender in anthropological practice has implications in the production and probably even in the validation of knowledge in the social sciences. This article has shown that it is not only gender that can affect data collection. The marital status, age and affiliation of the researcher to one or the other group and to institutions may also have effects in the data collection and knowledge production. In addition to the gender relationship that plays out between researchers and their informants, experience in the field also plays out in maintaining relationships amidst pressures or tensions linked to suspicion, as shown by Ayimpam et al. (2014). These authors have shown that learning to control emotions or social representations both on the side of the researcher and of the respondents is an ongoing challenge, throughout the field research. This article has shown the different contexts in which my inclusion and exclusion by my informants depend not only on the labels associated with me but also on the sensitivities related to questions on gender, politics or religion. Thus, the construction of a space of trust based on the intersubjectivity between researcher and informants can be complicated as much by their marital status, sex, gender, and age as by the conditions of the intercultural confrontation, explained in this article not because researchers are or consider themselves "Western" but rather because they are perceived by their informants as such.

Considering an African anthropologist working on Africa and Africans as a disguised outsider is not new (see Diawara et al. 2006). This article has shown that this consideration is not only reserved for European anthropologists, Christian or not, who study a Muslim sub-Saharan African society. It is also reserved for insiders, African researchers from this society, not because they are European or claim to be European but because they live in Europe and/or are funded by European organizations. Thus, whether they are originally from their study community or not, an anthropologist can be permanently considered or suspected as an "agent", an "informant" or a "spy" sponsored by a project, a hierarchy or an administration. That means, the practical

challenges of accessing information are part of the field research (see Niang et al. 2017). Not confronting them while researching at home or at other places does not mean that they do not exist. The important thing is for the anthropologist to know how to treat these different contexts with the same methodological rigor (Gullestad et al. 2004). The position of the Nigerien anthropologist who conducts ethnographic research in Niamey and who is interested in marriage and divorce despite his marital status, gender and place of residence as well as his relationship with his informants explains that the researcher is linked in many ways to the research process. This particular link with the informants goes beyond being an insider or outsider of the study population. Discussions on these statuses presupposed that the researcher mainly assumed one of the two statuses, each of which had advantages and disadvantages. As Merriam et al. (2001) point out, the above discussion has shown that the boundaries between the two positions are not always well defined.

As a Nigerien man, I was certainly an insider to my study population, who benefited from this position. Most of my informants considered me to be part of their community. In most cases, they expressed solidarity to me (Headland et al. 1990; Merriam et al. 2001). However, my marital status and my place of residence made my informants to treat me like an outsider. The social pressures and the labels that were associated to me come from the fact that I am originally from the studied society. These pressures are explained by the fact that I study my own culture. It is because I was "at home" that people in power and ordinary people could remind me of the importance of marriage. And it was also because I was affiliated to a university in a country in the Global North, perceived as "Western", that some saw me as an agent, working for the interests of "white people". This particular link with the respondents goes beyond the insider/outsider dichotomy of the study population and shows how these opposing positions can be combined in the same person, because I was also accepted for being considered an outsider of the study population. Finally, the different, real or supposed positionalities and positions linked to gender, culture and many other factors are tools that allow us to understand the dynamics and challenges of research within and/or between peoples and cultures.

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Fieldwork as Decolonising African Literary Studies

Researching Tanzanian Hip-hop and Spoken Word Poetry as a Ghanaian

Nikitta Dede Adjirakor

1 Introduction

At the dawn of the independence era in Africa, in the spirit of Pan-Africanism, Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, argued for Swahili's adoption as a continental language of unity. This led to Swahili's use in external broadcasts by the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation which included programmes like *Ghana Leo* (Ghana Today), *Maisha ya Wanawake Kiafrika* (Lives of African Women), and *Afrika Leo* (Africa Today), as well as its teaching in different higher educational institutions like the University of Ghana and the Ghana Insitute of Languages (Dzahene-Quarshie 2013: 73). While most of these services were eventually discontinued, Swahili continues to be taught as an undergraduate degree at the University of Ghana to further Kwame Nkrumah's Pan-African vision (Dzahene-Quarshie 2013: 77). While only a handful of students pass through the program each year, it has culminated in some Ghanaian scholars in Swahili studies such as linguist Amidu Assibi (1995; 2018) who has worked on Swahili morphology and syntax, linguist Josephine Dzahene-Quarshie (2013; 2016) who specialises in language contact and policies between Swahili and other African languages. Others include literary scholar Felix Sosoo (2013; 2018) who comparatively studies Swahili oral literature with Ghanaian folklore and global oral literature and Nikitta Dede Adjirakor who specialises in Tanzanian and East African popular culture (2017; 2020). This trans-regional relationship, although small, is significant for the trans-regional/inter-regional, Pan-African perspective it brings to scholarship, particularly in recent debates about

decolonising the academy, locating “Africa” in African Studies and the uneven power dynamics between global north and south scholarship.

In recent times, researchers have been sensitised to diverse positionalities and constructions of self in relation to research. Fieldwork is viewed not as a neutral, objective space, but one that is influenced by the researcher’s multiple identities, habits, and backgrounds marking fieldwork as a constant process of negotiation. As Akhil Gupta (2014: 397) aptly states, “not only is anthropological data often largely qualitative, but it depends in large measure on the affective and bodily practices and peculiarities of the ethnographer.” With a lens on reflexivity and positionality, a growing number of scholars are increasingly engaging in a reflexive understanding of their position in the field and the research process, considering factors like race (Henderson 2009; Hirsch 2019), gender (Atobrah 2019; Thompson 2019), parenting (Yacob-Haliso 2019) and sexuality (Clark & Grant 2015). While in African Studies, there are growing reflexive perspectives that reveal “the stories behind the findings” (Thomson et al. 2013), it is essential to expand upon the perspectives of Africans researching in Africa, particularly within renewed calls for decolonisation of the academy and broaden the conversation about researchers’ identities, particularly those underrepresented.

In particular, a reflexive awareness of fieldwork can influence research perspectives while addressing ethical, methodological and theoretical concerns. In this paper, I argue that fieldwork can produce new perspectives towards recent debates on decolonisation, mainly centring the experiences of African researchers doing research in Africa. A quick search for literature on fieldwork experiences related to Africa yields fewer results for African researchers and their experiences, a search described by political scientist Yolande Bouka (2015: 4) as “difficult to find [her]self” in the available literature. For instance, in the book “Women Researching in Africa”, published in 2019, only three out of the fourteen contributors identify as African, discussing explicit ways in which this identity influenced their fieldwork. In this paper, framed within the discourse of decolonisation, I particularly centre the positions of nationality and location, i.e., my selves as a Ghanaian working on Tanzanian literature while based in Germany. Thus, I reflect upon the intersections between institutional framing from the global north and the researcher’s self that straddles the global north and south. Drawing upon my work on popular cultural forms in Tanzania, I centre fieldwork as a method for place-based literary research in producing methodological and theoretical frameworks that centre the lived experiences of African lives. Fieldwork, I argue, demands a reflexive consideration of the self in relation to others, and can centre an ethical responsibility to research that guides towards a decolonial framework in intellectual knowledge production.

2 Building Frameworks from the Field: "Vibe" as a Way of Knowing Hip-hop and Poetry

The research upon which this paper draws from is my PhD thesis that explored the aesthetic experiences of popular cultural forms, specifically hip-hop and spoken word poetry in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.[1] I was interested in the place of popular culture in people's everyday lives, how they shape and are rendered meaningful in everyday lifeworlds. During this time, I travelled to Tanzania twice, spending eleven months, broken into two periods of seven and four months. Thus, in addition to textual readings, my research relied significantly on long-term immersion in the field, a characteristic of ethnography. This double methodology was necessitated by the research question that sought to understand how practitioners experience performances and texts. Hip-hop and spoken word poetry are especially characterised by their performative nature. In this sense, a textual reading alone proves one-sided and ethnographic tools, particularly fieldwork, exposes the contexts within which the texts are situated and embodied.

For literary scholars, fieldwork involving long-term immersion is often not a practice to contend with, regarded as "a strange task" in a discipline where immense value is often unsuitably placed on written texts over other textual practices (Seguín 2014: 9). However, fieldwork can be an indispensable methodological tool for place-based literary research, enabling literary scholars to ask, "what did the people write?" in dialogue with "what did people do", placing text in an encounter and engagement with context (Puri 2016: 40). Most importantly, I would argue that it re-emphasises texts that are not easily detached from their performative contexts, such as more oral centred ones, reengaging with their value. In my research, hip-hop and spoken word are revealed as valuable not only through an analysis of their written texts but also through their embodied, ephemeral affectations. This provides a methodological framework that involves close readings of the lyrics of hip-hop songs and spoken word poems and an investigation into the elements that make up the performance, i.e., the bodies of the performers and audience, spatio-temporal location and the written/memorised texts. It was through fieldwork, participant observation and interviews that it became obvious that these elements of the performance represented a methodological approach to these popular forms as well as a further site of theoretical conceptualisation. Simply, fieldwork reveals local epistemological approaches to popular culture, emphasising popular culture's value in people's lived experiences.

In my work, I was interested in hip-hop and spoken word as aesthetic sites of experience which warranted taking seriously how these forms are experienced and affect practitioners, shown through corporeality, embodiment, lived experience and practice. In their reflections upon these popular forms, practitioners used the word "vibe" to attempt a description of their experiences. From these reflections, vibe showed itself as an indispensable, original framework for conceptualising the aesthetic experience of popular cultural forms. Vibe, I argued, indicates a sensuous experience of the performance that is located in the specific encounter between the bodies of performer and audience, the text-in-performance and spatio-temporal location. Although fleeting, this experience is also a form of knowledge production through which people

[1] The Phd titled "I go for the vibe: hip-hop and spoken poetry as aesthetic practices in Dar es Salaam" was produced within the framework of the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS) at the University of Bayreuth, Germany and funded by the German Research Foundation under the project "Poetry as Aesthetic Practice. Form, Experience and Relation to Lifeworlds in Verbal Arts in Madagascar and Tanzania".

experience and know the world. Thus, 'vibe' becomes a methodological approach and a site of theorisation for hip-hop and spoken word in Dar es Salaam. The intellectual knowledge produced about these popular forms is rooted in the lived experiences of the people who are centred in this form of knowledge production.

Ghanaian feminist scholar Akosua Adomako Ampofo (2019: 68) has argued that research in Africa must be made up of "ingredients of an African-centered approach" which means research must be grounded in the lives and cultural imaginations of Africans. Such an approach, she maintains, is a decolonial approach to global knowledge as it questions the definitions of mainstream or marginalised knowledge. In particular, she writes that fields like popular culture, often discarded as valid sites of experience and theorisation provide adequate insight into people's lives and allow for the development of an African-centered epistemology that centers the experiences of African lives. Here, it is a defence for popular culture as a valid context of knowledge production, not solely as a reference point but also as a site for conceptualising methods, theories, and research approaches based on Africa. Vibe became a driving approach to my research, conceptualised through the experiences of my interlocutors. Although hip-hop and spoken word are transcultural forms that straddle the global and the local, I argue that vibe, revealed through interlocuters' affective experiences, allows for a uniquely Tanzanian perspective to these phenomena, revealing local ways of shaping everyday lifeworlds such as language use and gendered identities. Fieldwork, and in the case of performative texts, attending to the contexts and traces that performances leave on practitioners, enables conceptualising a framework like vibe that validates non-mainstream and marginalised ways of knowing. Such a framework that prioritises affective and experiential ways of knowing, validates popular culture's value and knowledge production and is developed out of the experiences and realities of African lives, is inherently a decolonial project, foregrounding forms of knowledge production that are often marginalised in the global knowledge industry.

Decolonisation cannot occur in a vacuum far away from the lives purported to be at the centre of epistemological production. Space and place become central to such a framework providing a material, historical, and affective grounding that engages with the day-to-day lives of those at the centre of research. As Robtel Pailey (2019) aptly writes, "epistemic decolonisation cannot happen in a political vacuum, separated from the African streets". However, merely engaging in fieldwork does not make research inherently decolonial and many scholars have written about the colonial Eurocentric trajectory of fieldwork as methodology amidst questions of power and othering (Smith 2012). A decolonial framework allows for an acknowledgement and further dismantling of the Eurocentric leanings of methodologies and paradigms as well as disobedience towards established epistemologies and canons. In literary studies, a decolonial framework of fieldwork enables a place-based engagement with African literature that demands a reconfiguration of questions of power, theory-making, data, methods and expertise. It potentially redefines what can be "chosen" as knowledge and approaches to knowledge to be presented in the academy's structural space. In their article "African Literature is a Country", Saint and Shringapure (2020) sought to investigate the kind of texts regularly taught in African literature courses that set up a seeming canonical representation of the literary scene. Written texts in English dominate such curricula, led by popular writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Adichie. As they further note, oral literature and texts written in African languages were severely marginalised while novels in English were the most taught genre. The diversity of African

literature, they conclude, did not feature in the curricula in academic institutions and call for a decolonisation of the curricula. This emphasis on written texts disregards the widespread use of orature and orality in different literary forms and reduces performative texts to trivial moments in the literary scene, a fundamental consequence of the colonial structure. When Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, Henry Owuor-Anuymba and Taban lo Liyong published their memo "On the Abolition of the English Department" in 1968, they sought to decolonise this colonial structure, emphasising the teaching and research of oral and performative texts, African language literatures and thereby, reconceptualising the curriculum from the ground up (Thiong'o 1972). Their discourse is similar to recent movements like #rhodesmustfall that agitate for decolonising the educational system by confronting its racist, colonial heritage and embracing an African based intellectual production.[2]

Therefore, decolonisation as praxis in African literature engages with both written and oral texts, foregrounding aspects of literature that are marginalised and thereby redefining what is chosen and theorised as knowledge. Fieldwork emphasises experience, extending, shifting and redefining the process of knowing through an engagement with the people at the centre of this knowledge. Further, what is produced are "situated knowledges" defined by one's embodiment, position and gaze (Haraway 1988: 581). Knowledge production is, therefore, inseparable from the social spaces within which they evolve, while highly depending on the researcher's positionality and identities. Fieldwork forces a turn towards the interdependent, often place-based processes through which knowledge is produced and can be theorised. Fieldwork showed in my work, that popular cultural forms are not merely trivial cultural practices but also act as sites of knowledge production, as people's reflections on their experiences and their affective knowledges revealed vibe as an indispensable framework that is rooted in situated experiences of the forms.

3 Being Ghanaian in Tanzania: Nationality, Language and Pan-Africanism as Currency

> Field note entry, Dar es Salaam, October 9, 2017:
>
> The other colleagues have returned to Germany and I'm surprised by how much of an impact that has made on my interviews. People I met through them seem more reluctant to meet with me now. I am not really having this issue with the interlocutors I met on my own. I get the feeling it's because I'm black and young, I don't seem so important. I get referred to a lot as "*huyu mtoto mdogo*" (this young child). It sometimes feels sarcastic as if to suggest that I am incapable of the position I find myself in. The race question seems to be the biggest issue though. I suspect because the other researchers are white, they have easier access to information. My being based in Germany positions me favourably but, in the end, my blackness outweighs that. I assumed our shared connections as Black Africans will be a positive point, but it often doesn't seem so especially when there are other Western colleagues present.

[2] For a discussion on the "Rhodes Must Fall" movement within a decolonial matrix, see Chantiluke et al. (2018).

> Their presence sometimes enhances my position as I gain access to the same spaces as them that I seem to be denied on my own.

> Field note entry, Dar es Salaam, November 11, 2017:
>
> Today I met with Nash MC and we surprisingly bonded over my background as a Ghanaian especially over Ghanaian rap music. I've increasingly seen this happen with other people. My nationality gives me some privilege here. I think it's rooted in the Nkrumah and Nyerere socialist connections. Ghanaian music is also quite popular and each artist I interview asks me to connect them to the Ghanaian scene. So far, my being Black has seemed more like an obstacle and I'm pleasantly surprised my being Ghanaian has given me a little privilege. It's not just the artists though. Even people on the streets want to have further conversations with me because I'm Ghanaian. They want to talk about football, kente and Nkrumah[3]. I spent a whole car ride talking about cocoa and chocolate. Who knew being Ghanaian would be a form of currency here?

I use these two vignettes as an entry point into exploring my identities in the field, centring the positions of nationality and location. I am a black Ghanaian woman based in a predominantly white institution in Germany. My research stays in Tanzania occasionally intersected with other colleagues in African Studies, sometimes white colleagues from the global north and sporadically black Ghanaian colleagues based in Ghana. In preparing for fieldwork, I familiarised myself with other scholars' works that reflexively engaged with their identities and was particularly struck by the relative lack of scholarship that centred the experiences of African scholars in Africa, particularly scholars of a different nationality than their research field.[4] Conversations about race appear to dominate in these discussions, highlighting the bias and unequal power distribution in knowledge production and circulation. This point is aptly illustrated by Frances Henderson who writes the following based on her experiences in Maputo:

> 'Why did you all think I was white?' I asked my in-country advisor about three weeks into my initial visit to Maputo, after we had established a rapport. 'Oh, because the people who come here from the U.S. to do research are white.' My advisor's statement was telling and opens the door to an analysis of issues of race and the production of knowledge about African people, culture, and politics (Henderson 2009: 291).

As an African American woman, Henderson's insight opens up considerations of epistemological production coloured by race that I find productive in thinking through my experiences in Dar es Salaam. I differ from Henderson in that whereas she was an African American woman in a Southern African country, I was a Ghanaian woman in an Eastern African country. Like Yolande Bouka (2015: 8) who describes her Togolese origins as creating a "continental connection" during her research stay in Rwanda, my being Ghanaian in Tanzania, furthered by my fluency in Swahili, facilitated a similar connection. Frances Henderson (2009: 292) further argues that "her subaltern status" created "the *possibility* of solidarity with the women of Southern Africa [emphasis in

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3 Kente is a type of fabric made from interwoven cloth strips of cotton and silk.

4 For some examples, see Bouka (2015) and Hirsch (2019).

original]" which was mitigated by her citizenship as American. This possibility was propelled by her racial similarity to the people of Maputo rooted in "historical linkages between 'shared' race as potentially shared culture" (Williams 1996: 77). Borrowing from Zora Neale Hurston's thoughts on skinfolk as distinct from kinfolk,[5] in cases like that of Henderson, the researcher is in a constant state of a "betwixt and between, identity – neither foreigner in a totally unknown form nor native of a fully knowable type" (Williams 1996: 77).

As a black person from Ghana, I was racially similar to my interlocutors in the field yet simultaneously unknown. Within this space was the negotiating of solidarity borne not necessarily only out of race and blackness but also of a national, Pan-African connection and cultural background. Inherently, these two positions acted as a currency to facilitate my entry and stay in the field, offering insights into the popular art scene in Dar es Salaam and shaping my relationships. For instance, as I illustrated in the second vignette above, the rapper Nash and I bonded quickly over my nationality as Ghanaian, leading to fantastic conversations about the Ghanaian music industry and its similarities and differences with the Tanzanian, East African scene. In my initial interviews and fieldwork practices, I often introduced myself in the professional sense, drawing upon my place in the university to highlight my purpose in Dar es Salaam. Eventually, I switched tactics and introduced myself with an emphasis on myself as Ghanaian, which I believe significantly facilitated my reception as a researcher as my interlocutors often viewed me as culturally similar, simply because we were African. This form of introduction also de-emphasised the academic context, which I would argue below, with my academic location in Germany generated distance between myself and interlocuters. By introducing myself as Ghanaian, there was a cultural similarity emphasised, for instance, with music, where interlocutors viewed me and my research through the lens of a potentially shared culture. Thus, I negotiated which self to highlight and present, leaning into the visible cultural and political relations that were more salient for my interlocutors and their social contexts.

I recognised that my interlocutors viewed this continental connection as a curious oddity and I was repeatedly informed that my interlocutors were used to seeing white researchers as opposed to Black, non-Tanzanian researchers in the field and could understand the former, seen as significantly culturally dissimilar, as interested in learning about a "foreign" space. However, my presence in the field was viewed as strange as interlocutors did not wholly see me as foreign in their context. I existed somewhere in between foreign and local, creating a space of negotiation. During interviews, this view did not cause confusion but rather offered great insights relating to the entangled global histories of hip-hop and spoken word. Interlocuters pointed to their knowledge of Ghanaian music to illustrate hip-hop's global and yet local nature, which guided numerous discussions about authenticity in language and popular culture, leading to conversations rather than one-sided interviews. On the other hand, this perceived cultural similarity led to confusion during my attendance at popular cultural events and in my day-to-day activities. Whenever people addressed me during such events, and I responded, they were visibly perplexed about my accent. Coupled with my dreadlocked hair and penchant for wearing West African print fabric people often assumed I was a "foreign" Tanzanian or East African from the diaspora. What was obvious was that it was essential for most people to place me and understand my nationality. This confusion often led to what they perceived as "teaching" moments, where

5 Zora Neale Hurston mentions this in her autobiography "Dust Tracks on a Road" (1942).

they tried to guide me through the Tanzanian experience. Globally, hip-hop retains a hypermasculine character and in Tanzania, numerous cultural and economic barriers for women, including unequal access to public space contributes to its masculine leaning form (Clark 2014). Although there are women hip-hop researchers in Tanzania, such as Msia Kibona Clark cited above, the combination of my gender as a woman and the initial confusion around my nationality created a sort of imbalance where the often-male hip-hop interlocuters aggressively "tested" me through questions and comments about obscure hip-hop facts. I was aware of the underlying gendered intent, which was exacerbated with the confusion around my nationality.

Accordingly, although interlocutors sometimes viewed me as closer to a local, I was also viewed as foreign, neither completely the other. However, I was significantly aware that nationality played a role in this negotiation space as the perceived possibility of solidarity, connection and similarity was based inherently in a historical Pan-African link. Ghana's relationship with Tanzania is rooted in a shared socialist and Pan-African history popularised by the two first presidents of both nations at independence, Dr Kwame Nkrumah and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, respectively. Language was pivotal to Nkrumah's vision of a Pan-Africanist continent who saw Swahili as fundamental towards redefining African lives in the post-colonial setting. Thus, Swahili in Ghana as a language in the University of Ghana's curriculum exists beyond simply being a foreign language. It is a language with a decolonising agenda. This discourse is prominent in debates about Swahili's adoption as a continental lingua franca, debates that are often ignited even at national and regional levels outside of East Africa (Assibi 1995; Khumalo 2018). Many Tanzanians expressed pride at the discourse of Swahili as a continental connector. Having studied Swahili in Ghana, language sustained the expression of a possible, negotiated solidarity as my interlocutors saw my language skills as a reflection of a perceived continental commonality, making language a fundamental currency that facilitated my entry and stays in the field. As a Ghanaian, the question of language within Tanzania's cultural and political context is extremely fascinating. Mwalimu Nyerere's vision of a Tanzanian identity was anchored on Swahili's deliberate promotion as a fundamental symbol of the nation. While Swahili was used during the colonial era for administrative purposes, it was chosen and promoted during the independence period as the language of the people, freedom and the new nation, mostly due to its "supratibalistic component" (Gibbe 1983: 182). It became the country's national and popular language, a symbol of its free and homogenised national culture. Therefore, although Tanzania is technically a multilingual country, Swahili remains intimately intertwined with Tanzanian identity, a role never accorded a single Ghanaian language. Instead, Ghana maintained a multilingual system that did not seek to privilege one language over the other (Boahene-Agbo 1985).

Coming from this multilingual background, I found fascinating the constructed nature of Swahili especially in relation to the nation's identity and its direct influence on the literary scene, although I also found it slightly stifling as I always wondered about its weighty effect on the "other" languages, especially the place of English within this context. This speculation led me to reflect upon the significant although overlooked number of poets, artists, and spaces who privileged English over Swahili but were notably absent in larger academic debates on popular culture in Tanzania. As I experienced the field, I pulled upon this thread or rather, this thread pulled at me, eventually becoming a significant frame for the thesis. As I wrote about spoken word and hip-hop spaces in Dar es Salaam, highlighting how English shaped some of them, I realised that this route would have been missing without my ethnographic encounters. Rashmi Sadana (2016: 160)

writing about the relevance of fieldwork to her work in literary studies maintains that "if embarking on fieldwork threw up my idea of which texts to study, it also opened up new arenas of questioning, and eventually, new texts in particular social and political contexts that called out for analysis". Much like Sadana, being in the field suggested new texts and questions that arose from my interactions with artists, poets and audience members of the performances. As Swahili became my currency into the field, I became even more aware of the overlooked English using artists and poets and their contributions to debates on language authenticity and identity. Rather than taking for granted the significance of Swahili towards the nation of Tanzania and the plethora of Swahili using artists, it opened up new arenas of questioning especially regarding renewed debates regarding the identity of English within post-colonial states. As hip-hop artists appropriate English in Tanzania to craft their entangled transcultural identities, they readjust the status of the language, shifting it from a hegemonic oppressor of local culture to a tool of decolonising perceived colonial standards. Elsewhere, Bill Ashcroft et al. (2002: 38) have argued that writers use the strategies of abrogation and appropriation to force colonial languages, in this case, English to "bear the burden of one's own cultural experience".

The discussion around nationality becomes even more pressing as it recalibrated relations between my self and the other, as people interpreted my presence including other Ghanaian scholars as a step towards the decolonisation of intellectual production, seeing our presence as a form of local and continental ownership and production. This was aptly conveyed by Tanzanian rapper KBC when he told me directly, "it's good to see another sister doing research on African hip-hop. It is usually white people who come and write books on it". [6] KBC's use of "sister" as a faux familiar connective is rooted in a racial similarity and shared continental connection. Sister attempts to dismantle a dualism between Africa as a place to extract data that is then solely processed and circulated in other places. I found KBC's statement relevant in unpacking approaches to and meaning of research in/on Africa as it highlights questions of identity, location, and epistemology. In particular, there is an irony to his statement as it appears to reject my location as a German based scholar in favor of emphasising my nationality as a guiding approach towards my research.

When feminist scholar Amina Mama (2007) questions if it is ethical to study Africa, she presses us to reflect on how our identities, geographical and historical locations, methods, and epistemologies inform our scholarly ethics in researching Africa. As she further and rightfully argues, simply being African does not exempt African scholars from questions of ethics (Mama 2007: 8). Concretely, I would argue that my being Ghanaian and a perceived sense of solidarity does not automatically exempt me from thinking about ethical scholarship and decolonisation as practice. Ethical scholarship is shaped by a sense of responsibility to African lives, which demands engagement in social contexts, uses methodologies and theories rooted in the research space, and is shaped by a reflexive reflection on positionalities and identities (Mama 2007). KBC's use of "sister" foregrounds the question of ethical scholarship, in that even as it negotiates a sense of solidarity, it questions a sense of responsibility towards the lives at the centre of my research. This was obvious in subsequent meetings with other artists, where I was challenged to be truthful and

[6] Interview, KBC, March 1, 2017. KBC was specifically referring to Dr. Msia Kibona Clark, a Tanzanian born scholar of African hip-hop cultures although there are a number of other women scholars on Tanzanian hip-hop such as Dr. Shani Omari.

respectful in my findings as a “sister”. This solidarity, racial and continental, rooted in ethics, demands a reflexive engagement with the field and the designing of methods and theories grounded in and reflect the everyday lived experiences of my interlocutors.

Fieldwork in literary studies can force such a reflexive, decolonial turn. Reflecting on the place of fieldwork in literary studies, Shalini Puri (2016: 40) suggests, “when a researcher reads in a library, nobody is reading her back. When one reads in the field, one is constantly being scripted, being made the object of a counter gaze, and is thereby forced to confront not only one’s geographical but also one’s historical location.” What I find productive about this quotation is the encounter between researcher and field that is set in a flexible, scripted process. Rather than a singular linear activity, fieldwork becomes a collaborative process formed through experience, foregrounding how our identities inform the process. For instance, for most artists, I represented an opportunity to connect with artists from Ghana, particularly in light of West African afrobeats music's popularity. In hip-hop, there have been collaborations between Ghanaian and Tanzanian artists. These include Ghana’s Kwaw Kese and Tanzania’s Professor Jay with the popular collaboration “Who Be You” in the 2000s and more recently in 2020, Tanzania’s Mex Cortez with Ghana’s Lyrical Joe produced “Holy Flow”. As Msia Clark (2012) has argued, hip-hop from Ghana and Tanzania share similarities as they were both introduced during economic structural adjustments in the 1980s, often act as social commentaries and invoke reverential images of their respective first presidents Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere. Thus, there already exists a connection between the Ghanaian and Tanzanian hip-hop scenes I became part of. On certain occasions, I facilitated this connection such as writing a blog review about Tanzanian hip-hop artist Nash MC for a Ghanaian hip-hop blog and recommending Tanzanian hip-hop for its playlists.[7] In the field, I was scripted continuously through my nationality, viewed through the lens of shared solidarity that appeared to translate into a collective sense of ownership of intellectual production.

4 The Politics of Location

What then does it mean for the rhetoric of promoting and protecting local knowledge when I am a Western-based scholar? What does this suggestion of continental ownership drawn from cultural similarity and nationality mean when placed against the politics of my location in Bayreuth, Germany? In her reflections on her fieldwork in Malawi, Joanna Woods (2009: 56) suggests that her status as a researcher was often viewed as more authentic and acceptable if she was seen as related to an organisation linked to humanitarian aid where the researcher came across as “helping”. Wood’s reflections suggest that the researcher’s identity shaped by the organisation that backs them is an essential aspect of fieldwork. My location, as based in Germany, usually authenticated my presence in the field, and the occasional presence of white colleagues enhanced this positive reception. As I soon realised, this reaction was built on the assumption of my access to resources – educational, monetary and organisational – based on my location in a western country. Nevertheless, this authentication often clashed with my other identities. My

[7] I wrote for the Ghanaian hip-hop website Yoyo Tinz, which were looking to expand their coverage of hip-hop to cover the entire African continent. See www.yoyotinz.com (last accessed on 27.03.2021).

other selves as Ghanaian, Black and African eventually showed as the preferred selves. Ultimately, it became apparent that my interlocutors were increasingly reacting negatively to my location as based in Germany, seeing it as a form of epistemic violence. As one interlocutor mentioned in different conversations, I was a conduit for the recolonisation of knowledge by the west as my research would be based abroad. It was especially such conversations and discourses that led me to reflect upon how the field could produce a decolonial matrix for my work. If my interlocutors inferred my presence as a form of epistemic violence from my location, how could I do research that was the opposite? How could I do research that centred their lives and epistemologies, caring not to marginalise their interests and agendas?

Scholars have written about the marginalisation of African voices and interests in African Studies and the global academy and the privileging of intellectual labour from the global north (Nolte 2019). This is manifested in knowledge networks around academic publishing, workshops, conferences prominently based in the West and the entrenchment of Eurocentric theories and methodologies. Fieldwork itself is not detached from this bias. For instance, Chisomo Kalinga (2019) writes about the exhaustion of African bodies as they are extracted for data, often unethically by Western based scholars, who lack a nuanced understanding of their lived experiences. Here again, Amina Mama's (2007) question of how to ethically study Africa remains infinitely relevant. While fieldwork demands an engagement with people's lifeworlds and a reconfiguring of research approaches, it can also be a form of epistemic violence. What comes to fore is the centrality of place to fieldwork, i.e., the space of the field, the space of intellectual knowledge production and the spaces of circulation of this knowledge. Heavily bound to this spatial and profoundly political process is the dualism of research on/in Africa that removes data to be processed elsewhere. A decolonial matrix foregrounds the researcher's responsibility in creating a liberatory, collaborative work that emphasises the value of the lives at the centre of the research. Speaking about hip-hop in Senegal, Ali Neff (2015: 450) suggests that researchers should hold a "critical ear toward these neocolonial discourses" and participate in "research based in collaboration and advocacy with artists on the margins". Such a decolonial framework "offers the possibility of movements and solidarities altogether different from the trajectory of extraction that haunts the work of the global media industries" (Neff 2015: 450).

Such a collaborative endeavour became a significant process of my fieldwork. My work went beyond documenting hip-hop and spoken word to working with poets and artists to amplify their work outside the academy. With some poets, we produced a short documentary on women's sexual and reproductive health issues in Africa, a topic that often cropped up in discussions with poets that identified as women, and in their performances.[8] The documentary titled "A Thousand Needles" created a space of collaborative work with the poets my research was based on, also becoming a methodological tool for my research. Its focus on women's health helped to locate and foreground a stigmatised topic, helping to advocate for open conversations through the poets' works. This collaboration which included writing sessions, long conversations and visual brainstorming sessions with some poets provided a different texture to the research. My work contributed to the advocacy that these poets had already started, merely helping to amplify it through the film, especially centring the women in the poetry scene. As we produced the film, I

[8] The film "A Thousand Needles" is available at www.athousandneedlesfilm.com (last accessed on March 15, 2021).

became especially attuned to the knowledge produced on and around poetry, shaping my intellectual enquiry and informing my methodological and theoretical approaches, centring the lives of the poets. Producing the film as a collaborative endeavour demanded an ethical perspective to fieldwork, one that sought to amplify rather than marginalise the lives of those at the centre of the research. This collaborative endeavour falls within what Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) rightfully posits about decolonising research where he writes,

> decolonising methodology, therefore, entails unmasking its role and purpose in research. It is also about rebelling against it; shifting the identity of its object so as to repositon those who have been objects of research into questioners, critics, theorists, knowers, and communicators (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017).

5 Conclusion

Being a black Ghanaian woman based in Germany influenced my research on the popular cultural forms of hip-hop and poetry in Tanzania in many ways. Drawing on vignettes and experiences from the field, I have highlighted the messiness, complexity and multi-layeredness of my identities intersecting with the field. The field itself is not a neutral passive space but rather exists with its underlying power structures and norms. As the researcher encounters the field, it opens up many possibilities for reconfiguring the research process. In particular, fieldwork proves a strategic tool for locating Africa in African Studies by demanding an engagement with the lives of those at the centre of the research. As I have argued, fieldwork can provide new perspectives towards debates on decolonisation. In African literary studies, fieldwork remains a relevant methodological tool for emphasising the value of oral, performative texts. By hanging out with practitioners, soaking and prodding, I explored the aesthetic experiences of hip-hop and spoken word in their everyday lives, placing the texts in dialogue with the contexts and networks within which they were produced. This approach guided my methodological and theoretical conceptualisation from the ground-up, rooted in the lived experiences and lives of practitioners of these forms. As I have argued, Vibe provides a site of conceptualisation grounded in the cultural practices and imaginations of practitioners. To truly think of decolonising African literary studies, it is such an approach that we must take.

In addition, my identity as Ghanaian and my knowledge of Swahili acted as currencies that facilitated my stay in the field, being interpreted as a Pan-African and decolonial approach to knowledge production and ownership. When intersecting with my location in Germany, a different perspective was revealed where my presence was interpreted as a form of violence. However, at the centre of this process was attention towards the ethical study of African literature and African lives, which resulted in a deliberate, collaborative approach to research that centred my interlocutors' lives. Fieldwork thus produces a space of negotiation while demanding a reflexive engagement with the lived experiences of those researched, providing a matrix that foregrounds marginalised genres, ways of knowing and ultimately, provides a way to rethink knowledge production in the academy.

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Literary Fieldwork in Nairobi

Becoming *Chinku* and the “Third Mankind”

Mingqing Yuan

1 Introduction

> At a friend’s invitation, I attended the launch ceremony of the cooperation between China UnionPay, a Chinese financial corporation, and the State Bank of Mauritius in the Continental Hotel in the city center of Nairobi. With all Kenyan waitresses dressed in red *cheongsam* and two waiters in Maasai clothing drumming and singing to welcome the guests, I was standing together with my flatmate, an Indian working for an Italian NGO, and another Chinese, who works for a Chinese technology company in Kenya. Then, a high-ranking official from the State Bank of Mauritius came to us and started chatting. He asked about our occupations and when he heard that I was doing field work in Kenya, he seemed very interested and asked, “what’s the topic?”, to which I replied, “Kenyan literature”. It was very noticeable how his smile froze as he confusedly asked, “then what are you doing here?”. I felt a bit uneasy and taken aback, not knowing how to explain why those cultural decorative elements can inform my research project, but I was not completely surprised by this question, since it often came up in one form or another by people who learned that I was doing fieldwork in Kenya about literature. Why Kenya? Why Literature? Why are you here? Or even, is there literature about China and Kenya? (Fieldnote, September 12, 2019)

Justifications, explanations and even self-defence are always needed when I state that I’m in literary studies. The feeling of “disciplinary homeless” always accompanies me, especially when meeting historians or anthropologists in the field, who question me about research methodology in my literary fieldwork. I always have to justify why I am doing fieldwork and why it is not enough

to just read some novels at home. Meanwhile, the general curiosity and doubt about a literary scholar on China-Africa studies sometimes also offer a recluse and excuse for me, as this topic presumptuously is not financially sensitive or hard-core political. As a Chinese national doing research on topics related to China and Africa, I am constantly asked (also by myself) what purpose my fieldwork serves and what literary studies can uniquely contribute to the understanding of the massive commodity and capital movements between China and Kenya in this globalized time. On one hand, all these questions show a pervasive institutional and disciplinary delineation of literary studies, which partly isolates it from the world outside of books (written texts); on the other hand, it entails questions of what literary fieldwork is, how it is or should be carried out and what the relationship between field and texts is.

Thus, what is my positionality as a Chinese literary scholar in Nairobi? China's recent prominent engagements with Africa receive attention both in the media and academia. Questions of how to situate and interpret China's rise are often met with divisive opinions of it either being a neo-colonizer or an anti-imperialist comrade who was also previously colonized. This debate repeats a binary thinking, but it also ascertains that China's global rise disturbs the long existing dichotomies between the West and the rest and of the centralized and marginalized. In this sense, is there a pre-existing positionality for me to assume in my fieldwork in Nairobi? Or even, is there a gaze specially belonging to and projected on Chinese scholars doing fieldwork in Kenya? This paper would like to address these questions by reviewing and reflecting on my own fieldwork experience as a Chinese in Nairobi through the lens of positionality and reflexivity. It is an attempt to see how relationships and boundaries are negotiated and intersected in a dynamic and complex power network and to raise attention to the nuanced interactions and literary interventions on the ground.

As Puri and Castillo (2016: 6-9) summarise, the fieldwork within humanities, especially literary studies, is not only sharing fuzzy boundaries with anthropology and its interest in everyday life within larger structure and context, but is also involved with area studies, especially studies and discussions on the Global South. In this sense, literary fieldwork, seemingly dealing with imagination, is highly political, closely related to geopolitics and a lived experience, transferring the activity of reading to embodied, temporal and spatial engagements. Both the authorial voice and the readers' responses and interpretations play a crucial role in the process of "data-collection".

In August 2019, I started my trip to Nairobi, two years after the launch of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) from Nairobi to Mombasa, which is part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It was the same year that the contract of the SGR got leaked and China was criticized for its "debt diplomacy". Even though China has often been portrayed as the neo-colonizer in African media since the early 2000s, long before the leak, its economic and political activities are neither based on colonial baggage or "legacy" as it is in the case of the UK or France, nor violently executed on a political and cultural level. The re-emergence of the term neo-colonialism, which is defined in its broadest sense, does speak volumes about the ills of current capitalist systems and actually admits the fact that Chinese activities in Africa are carried out within the framework and infrastructure of the world economy with a set of rules that inherits the colonial system and that puts Africa in a disadvantaged position economically. However, the naming of China as a neo-colonizer due to its relatively "late" coming to the interactions with Africa, actually reveals a linear timeline with the

West again deemed as more advanced and exemplary. In this sense, undeniably both China and Africa are in a postcolonial context, but power asymmetry between the two demands a more nuanced, dynamic and closer look. To some extent, my topic is closely related to current affairs and development as well as political comics and comedy shows, but it provides another picture outside of this neo-colonial debate.

My trip was designed to find more literary texts on China and Kenya, including political cartoons and comedy shows, another form of narratives that address China's presence in Kenya. Thus, the trip included archival research as well as studio visits with interviews of writers and cartoonists in-between. I find the discussions about positionality and reflexivity useful for disentangling the complexity and fluidity of relationship between me and the interviewees. On one hand, they touch upon the dynamics and diversity of relationality in the fieldwork, especially in regard to the widely conceived binarity between outsider and insider; on the other hand, they address the impacts and even gaps, regrets and misunderstandings in the process, which further exerts influence on the selection, definition and interpretation of data.

Positionality often refers to positions and identities of a person that influences one's opinions and understandings in a certain social and political context, but its close relationship with progressive movements in the 1960s sometimes renders the understanding of it to be rigid and categorized according to identity category. As Robertson summarises, positionality

> is premised on ever more specific categories of identity that can invoke a kind of cultural relativity […and] retain[s] an asymmetrical relationship between 'the West' and 'the Third World'. […] Not only can positionality become a form of self-stereotyping, it can also effectively stereotype others in a way similar to mirroring: as 'the self' the other way around (Robertson 2002: 789).

Robertson's article doubts the effectivity of naming and using identity categories and points out the implication of "cultural relativity", as Merriam et al. (2001: 411) summarise, that "positionality is thus determined by where one stands in relation to 'the other'". This cultural relativity discussion can also be seen in the discussion about insider and outsider, about native and foreign researchers. However, I would like to take cultural relativity and distance of differences out of categories a prior to emphasize the elasticity and negotiation of positionality in the fieldwork and to take the social and cultural structure that stipulates the differences between self and other into a dynamic and shifting terrain. In this sense, positionality is not a rigid, previously fixed precondition but comes from reflexivity in the interaction and negotiation with the constantly changing social and power structure and actors. The positionality of a researcher is not just determined by his or her own social class, cultural background or tags based on identity categories; instead, it is a processual variable that is closely related to situation, relationality and even performativity of the researcher in the field.

Meanwhile, positionality should not be understood as a fully conscious self-positioning, as Gillian Rose's (1997: 311) discussion of "transparent reflexivity" questions the visibility and knowability of one's positionality. This actually puts the reflexive and analytical power of scholars into question. Rose argues that since identity is constructed through social relations and differences, this determines the failures of transparent reflexivity in relation to a visible positionality, both of which assume a knowable self and other. She proposes to render the agency of the researcher "as

a performative effect of her relations with her researched others, […] a 'decentered self'" (Rose 1997: 316). Her emphasis on "webbed connections" acknowledges intentional or unintentional deviations in actions and understandings through the performativity of identity. The dynamic and even contradictory workings of relativity and positionality can cause and be caused by conflicting and fluid identifications and debates within the researcher's self, between the researcher and the researched or the field, and between the field and the larger context and discourse. This partly explains the need for critical reflections on regrets, mistakes and ignorance in the field after leaving it.

The main methods that I used in my fieldtrip are individual interviews and archival research into historical records and media reports. The interviews contained two threads, one on the Kenyan artists who have worked on China and the other on the Chinese diaspora in Nairobi; the two differed but also interrelated. The interactions and dynamics between the two groups also feature in my overall project, which offers perspectives on China-Africa from a quite diverse spectrum of people across occupations, educational backgrounds, social classes and religious beliefs. In the following parts of this article, I will use some situations that I encountered in the field to reflect on the construction of positionality and the relationship between fieldwork and literary studies, even though these moments cannot be directly defined as "data".

2 "Where are You From?"

Questions about one's origin or nationality are often the start of a conversation, but they come in diverse forms such as a simple "*Ni hao*," ("hello" in Mandarin) which already categorises an east Asian-looking person as a mainland Chinese. This ethnic greeting constantly reminds me of my distinctive physicality on the ground. This marked-out foreignness does bring me benefits, including finding help more easily, but it also sometimes puts me into a situation in which to perform or exhibit my "(non)-Chineseness". Officially affiliated with a German institution for almost six years and flying to Nairobi from Germany, this link with the West allows for improvising and performativity in the field, manoeuvring the conceptualizations both associated with China and western Europe. This "German" card can be taken out in some situations to counter certain images of China and to disrupt the direct link between physical appearances and assumptions of one's place of origin as well as expectations of certain responses, but in retrospect, I think my selective answer to my social identity might have infringed the line of ethics as a manipulation of power relations. My preference for this fluidity in identities also comes from an elite education background that enables me to think and have the cultural capital to transcend boundaries. Acting like a so-called "world citizen" is a privilege embedded in the possibility of international mobility which makes my transition and "performativity" possible and that gives me the chance and ability to perform.

The incident that increased my consciousness about the question of nationality and ethnicity was the following:

> It occurred when I was wandering through central Nairobi shortly after my arrival and tried to take a photo of a government building. I was on the other side of the street and snapped one photo of the building simply out of the admiration of its grandeur.

> Then an armed security guard in uniform came to me and asked me whether I took a photo of that building. I affirmed, after which he pointed to a small board on the side of the gate and asked me to read it. That was the moment when I realized that taking photos was not allowed here. I turned to the guard who demanded to see my phone. I handed it over to him and he found the photo along with some other photographs of government buildings that I took previously in a different district, where I did not see a no-photo sign either. Then he said, "I have to take you to the police station now, because you have taken so many illegal photos". My first thought was that I have never experienced a Kenyan prison which will definitely be a very unique experience, but the thought of nobody to bail me out in Nairobi propelled me to make an effort to mitigate the case. I said they were just photos and asked if I could simply delete them from my phone. He suddenly asked where I was from and whether I could speak English. I was surprised by the question since our whole conversation had already been carried out in English, and so I answered positively since I "came" from Germany. This answer that I unconsciously used to prove my English level made him scrutinize me further which was soon followed by the question of what I was doing there. I replied that I was a student studying Kenyan literature and very new to Kenya. He demanded to see my student ID and asked how long I would be staying in Kenya. I presented the required documents and answered the question truthfully. He examined my student card while holding my phone and then said he would still need to take me to the police station because I had simply taken too many photos. At that moment, the mixed feeling of nervousness, shame, regret and the anger of being treated this way brought me on the verge of tears. I did not understand why some photos could bring me to prison, so I just repeated that I could delete the photos. He did not speak after my pleading. I felt that I was expected to say something, but I did not know what else to say so I just stood there in silence under the sun. Maybe after one minute or so, he said, "Okay, I forgive you this time, and you can delete them and go" (Fieldnote, September 11, 2019).

In that moment during the conversation, I was mainly blaming myself for not being observant as I took photos and felt lucky and thankful to be "forgiven" and let go in the end, but in retrospect, the final comment of the guard and the unnecessary seriousness or threat made me suspicious about the real purpose of the questioning. It was noticeable that he was confused and uncertain after I presented my student card. I do not know whether the invitation to the police station is a common practice stipulated by the regulations or whether it is just used to extort bribery based on the stereotypes of Chinese in Kenya who are known for their limited English abilities and "collaboration" – petty bribery – with local police. I do not know whether I was allowed to go due to his generosity or the German student card that I showed, or just being a female exhibiting vulnerability through being on the verge of tears or my inexperience and inability to understand and carry out the "local practice". I also do not know whether I was stopped only because of my wrong-doing or because of my foreign looks or even more precisely my Chineseness. Later I searched that place on Google Maps and saw a comment describing almost the same experience, but clearly that person was not forgiven and had to pay 5,000 Kenyan shillings, approximately 50 USD, for one photo. Similarly, when I told this story to some Chinese residing in Nairobi, they also suggested that the intention of the guard was bribery, which is not uncommon and might not

specifically target Chinese based on their experience, though the demanded amount of the bribe might vary in different situations. Since then, I regretted my dumbfounded reaction and not taking the questioning easier and "questioning" back the guard to pursue the "hidden" reasons of being halted. The answers to my confusion will remain unclear forever but the incident shows that entanglements and intersectionality might all contribute to the happening of a certain relationality through various possible divisions and categorizations. Even though this is not a structured interview designed for my research, it does impact my understanding of transcultural interactions in everyday life.

How to answer where I am from plays a role in my interactions with the Chinese community as well. This question often comes after the inquiry about name, out of a yearning to know whether one comes from the same or a close region back in China. China has a large population with diverse ethnic backgrounds and different respective dialects as well as living and food customs. Chinese companies and expatriates in Kenya are also diverse in their motivations, associated organizations and socio-economic backgrounds. They are not always co-operators, sharing solidarity with each other in another country. Some companies and people have a strong geographical attachment and belief in regional differences. No doubt, it is easier for persons to communicate and relate better when they share similar memories and dialects of a certain area, but this might also install a linguistic and sentimental barrier towards other groups. Thus, it is not uncommon to be asked the question among the Chinese community and to establish some relationships along this line. I attended a food gathering with some Chinese diasporas where there were games designed in-between to facilitate the participants knowing each other. During the game, individuals are not addressed by their respective names but by the name of the province or city that they come from. This raises attention to the differences within the Chinese community and involves the inner politics and geopolitics within China. Certainly, I have to admit that my alertness to this question is out of a sensitivity to some stereotypes and prejudice towards the province where I come from and the observation of a high concentration of people from one adjacent area in China in certain industry or business in Kenya. On the national level, since the Chinese government carried out a policy called "provincial assignment for project construction" (*duikouyuanjian*), through which one provincial government is assigned for an African country in project construction, even though the project might be signed between the Chinese central government and African governments, workers from these provincial companies tend to mainly come from these provinces, which determines the provincial concentration in a specific African nation. On the individual level, some successful entrepreneurial companies tend to be family companies or based on one's own network, which to some extent also explains the emphasis on regional ties. This emotional and economic closeness constructed by geographical affinity back at home brings the existing dynamics and heterogeneity within China to Kenya, which deconstructs the homogeneous imagination of a holistic Chinese community.

The question of origin is not simply about place, nationality, ethnicity or physicality but also about all social factors including education, class, power dynamics and even my own experience and performance, both in the past and at that specific moment. All these above-mentioned instances might not be considered valid data to inform literary theories, but they remain as a perspective to enquire microlevel interactions and representations in the literary texts and provide a glimpse into the dynamics of negotiations of positions and power relationships in daily life that inform fictional writing and literary imagination. The conceptualization of a certain category as nation or

academic identity might serve as an approach for analysis, but it does not automatically become a position. There are more mechanisms and intersections at work that reinforce or disrupt the discursive practices and power structures, which complexly negotiate and act out the positionality in relations. Those unclear moments are points of entry to my research on how China is perceived and points of reflexivity on how I have biases, stereotypes and conceptualizations of Kenya. These moments of confusion and missed chances are the reminders of the fact to me, when I approach the imaginary world in texts, that there exists no homogeneous China or Kenya as a self-explanatory category and it is not simply a self and other division but more dynamic and fluid. This drives me to abandon all my previous theoretical frames such as "the gaze" or orientalism in approaching Kenya-China writings.

3 "*Chinku, Chinku*"

I stayed at an Airbnb in Kileleshwa in Nairobi during my field trip. *Matatu* are small vans or minibuses ran by different private companies that I took almost every day to the city center to go to the archives. The drivers and conductors took me just as any other passenger without any gaze salute or teasing and I felt no pressure to engage in conversations as in taxis. This generated an illusion that I was just like anybody else on the matatu, rushing from one place to another.

> In the morning, the *matatu* was caught in a traffic jam close to Odeon, the matatu central station. I was sitting next to the window and heard some metal knocking on the bus. It startled me because it reminded me of the stone that was thrown at the window of the train carriage that I was sitting in when I was in Morocco, but when I turned over, I saw three to four *matatu* men in their red uniform waving at me with shouts of, "*Ni hao*!" and, "China!" (*Chaina*). I smiled and waved back. When they saw me turning around, one of them did a kunfu pose in the narrow gaps between *matatus* and I laughed very hard. It was a mixed feeling of amusement and a slight taste of magical realism. Do they think this is the way Chinese greet each other? Or do they think that I am a kungfu master just because of my physical look? (Fieldnote, September 5, 2019).

I wonder where their impressions come from and what they think Chinese are, but I am sure that this attention is different from those that I got in a small, German town.

During my visits in the studio of a comedy show, I saw a video named "Chinku, Chinku" in the archives, which contained an episode on the relationship between China and Kenya. The name caught my attention due to its similarity with the term "chink" in English, which has a derogatory denotation and is considered offensive, so I asked the staff what *chinku* ment and if it carries any cultural implications in Kenya and where it comes from, as made-in-China goods are often referred to as *fong kong* in Zimbabwe and *ching kong* in Nigeria.[1] The two staff members talked and thought for a long time and reached the conclusion that they did not know and they did not think it was related to the English word "chink", at least not in its derogatory sense. Does it come

[1] This information is provided by Deng Zheyuan and Zhang Lifang.

from "chink" in the English context or is it a local transliteration of Zhongguo (中国), the name of China in Mandarin, to Sheng or Swahili? Undoubtedly, Chineseness is marked out in this word, but should it be directly submerged to the discussion of race or even "yellow peril" in some examples? With the curiosity about the meaning of the word, I searched the internet to see how it is used in context. The finding is a song by Jabidii from 2018 published on Youtube named "China Chinku", which depicts Kenyans imitating Chinese by acting in kungfu poses popularized by movies of Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan and wearing Chinese clothing, including Asian conical hats and red lanterns to signify the peculiarity of Chinese, their love for money and disbelief in God. This video somehow connects the episode that I had on the matatu and the term *chinku*, but it also opens the space to distinguish the differences within similar Kenyan and Western conceptualizations of China, since these similar cultural articulations come out of different power hierarchies and have a different historical lineage. This further questions my own interpretation frame of whether to directly insert these cultural productions into a western narrative or to take the phenomenon as a changeable and negotiated dynamic with cultural specificity. For me, to suspend judgement and routinized interpretations are the beginning for critically reflecting on one's positionality. Being *chinku* or being named as *Chinku* is a position but not identity, a fragmented space to negotiate instead of dwelling and an angle to enter a debate. This might be better seen in another incident.

During my fieldwork, I was also looking for historical archives. After spending almost four weeks there, I got to know most of the staff. On the last day, I went to bid farewell to them.

> A member of staff came to me and asked whether I really was from China. I said yes, and he asked whether I could bring him a second-hand smartphone when I came back to Kenya. I was not prepared for this turn of the conversation and was not sure whether he was joking or being serious as it is widely known that made-in-China goods are often associated with fakeness or low quality. Then he added that China produces good smartphones and perhaps it would be easy to find a good second-hand one for him. I was perplexed since I was not going back to China but to Germany. I told him that and it seemed to surprise him. He staggered and simply repeated that if I returned to China before coming back to Kenya, I should remember him and his request (Fieldnote, September 13, 2019).

This conversation impressed me not because of his directness but because of his conceptualization of Chinese goods and the turn at the mentioning of Germany. The literary texts and media reports that I encounter often associate Chinese goods and projects with low-quality and cheapness. This positive conceptualization of Chinese products surprised me and motivated me to look more into the section. Chinese phone brands such as Huawei, Xiaomi and the other three owned by Transsion Tecno, Infinix and Itel are not far away from Kenyans' daily life but the latter three are mainly focusing on the African markets. In addition to phones, the comedians that I was following online also post on some app developed by Transsion. This interaction reveals a more nuanced understanding of "made in China" and exposed my own bias towards Chinese goods in Africa. It also called my attention to the line between have and have-not. I do not know whether these words are meant to please me or to increase his chances of getting a phone for free, but clearly I was taken as a more well-off person with extra phones to give away and was considered to have easier access to "good Chinese phones" since I am Chinese. Differences are drawn not only according to my physical appearance, the impression of Chinese government, companies and

goods but also to me as a scholar doing research, the mobility and entitlement that I carry with me due to my educational background, which mixes the so-called Chineseness and Western thinking and even self-orientalization.

In addition, from the very beginning I had an apologetic feeling about the mass-produced Chinese goods sold in the local markets, especially second-hand clothes with Chinese characters on them. I deplored the withering of the local industry disadvantaged by Chinese goods in price and felt Kenyans as have-nots being exploited under the flooding-in of Chinese capital and commodity, especially after I experienced a sharp contrast in the residence between some Chinese expatriates and local Kenyans.

> One time after a whole day in the Bunimedia studio, I walked to the matatu station with Chris, an intern at the studio who was about my age. As we walked through the street stands nearby, I expressed my thoughts with a tone of apology to him about so many Chinese goods and Chinese being in Nairobi. I was expecting some criticism from him but to my surprise he answered, "You know, that's also how these people make a living. It's they who brought Chinese goods here. Perhaps without Chinese goods, they won't be able to make a living, and many people cannot afford many living necessities if these Chinese things are not sold." (Fieldnote, August 28, 2019).

This made me aware of my own negligence and blindness to local agency and the hypocrisy of my imaginative condescending sympathy. Consciously or unconsciously, I assumed and positioned myself as privileged in opposition to the locals in a binary discourse between exploiters and exploited. I thought this self-critique was a reflexive review of my positioning, but it actually reinforced my assumption of a binary position of either-or, an essentialized simplification and understanding of nationality and class. It is a condescending, pretentious self-critique. My interlocutor's comments on the other hand showed his empathy and understanding, which problematizes the binary between the researcher and the researched, the previous one not as the sole knowledge producer and the latter one not as a passive object for study.

Certainly, the performativity within my own and my interlocutor's actions should also be taken into account. Did I express my uneasiness about China's presence on the ground out of my received education and information acquired from some biased reports and/or out of a desire to distinguish myself from the "business and politics" people, to bestow value and a certain objectivity into the position of being a "scholar", especially a literary scholar? Was I appropriating the criticism against China to seek for an acknowledgement of my open-mindedness and self-differentiation from other *chinkus*, rebelling against the stereotypes by adopting the position of critics? And was his answer really what he thinks about commodities made in China or was it because he was talking to me, a Chinese researcher? Did he make this comment based on his own life experience; because of his university-educated background that enables him to see different angles?

However, unfortunately I missed the chance to find the answers in that very moment and what remains accessible is only my point of view. All these questions drive me for a review of my own subjectivity and positionality. Being a Chinese national does not imply a naturally separate stance and view from the Western knowledge system or naturally a Chinese perspective. What I detect in myself is the inheritance of the imperial gaze projected both on myself and Kenya, both

stereotyped and represented in certain discourses. The fieldwork experience instead proves the invalidity and inability of directly applying concepts of race and nationality in the Western context to the context in Kenya and ascertains the failure of one-dimensional and imposing paradigm of self and other. Positionality is not only an issue of identity but is a process experienced and constructed through interactions, communication and even miscommunication. This is not to deny the existence of certain categories and materiality, which delineates and restricts the positions, but the ambiguity and dynamics that challenges the rigidity and limits of identity politics should be the focus that allows the positionality to grow and multiply in multiple directions. This also reveals the transition of a private and personal matter to a dialogical positioning. To some extent, positionality is not only where my interlocutor positions me or where I personally stand but also in which context the conversation takes place and how the relationship between me and my interlocutor is. This allows the performativity, especially when I said or acted in certain ways, consciously or unconsciously, to reinforce a self-image internally and to project an image of myself externally.

4 “So, You’re a Real Third Mankind!”

In Nairobi, even though I only knew two Chinese before my arrival, it turned out to be very easy to establish links with the diasporic community. Most of the time when asked, they were either expatriates from some Chinese companies residing in Kenya for a limited time or short-term exchange, but there were also investors, consultants, global nomads and scholars with degrees obtained in Europe or the U.S. who had long-term plans in Kenya. This means that a huge diversity exists in the group of Chinese in Nairobi and this might produce different facets and dimensions of China’s engagements with Kenya. However, among all these people in infrastructure, diplomacy, business, media and scholars from different areas with different specialization, I seemed to be the only one doing literary studies. Often after my self-introduction, questions followed ranging from the surprise and doubt about the existence of Kenyan literature to the usefulness of literary studies but most of the time, the conversation turned to another topic.

> Once at a party, after I revealed my research area, a consultant working for a famous international consulting firm happily said: “I’ve read some Kenyan literature! *Out of Africa* is very well-written! Have you visited Karen’s house? It is pretty”. Despite a strong reservation, mixed feelings and the urge to talk back to him, I simply answered him: “No, I have not.” Then he asked: “But what can you contribute to the understanding of China and Kenya? How do you predict the future of the relationship? Can novels tell you that?” I answered honestly that I did not know, even though I became more certain at that moment that I should continue with my research and certainly not limit it solely to academia. (Fieldnote, August 24, 2019)

This encounter made me reflect on the possible contribution of my own work and the positioning of literary studies. Should it be related to area studies, to policy-oriented conclusions? Or should it remain “detached” or join the highly political discussion of international relations? What is the boundary, or should there even be a disciplinary boundary? Does the perspective on an individual and human level really contribute to the knowledge production or mutual understanding? What is the responsibility of literary scholars eventually? These questions still remain central to my

research, but this encounter exactly ensures the values of literary studies in understanding interactions and categorizations between Kenya and China. Another encounter that forced me to reflect on gender and the relationship between literature and the world took place at a group gathering.

> I attended the gathering of a religious group for Chinese and Chinese overseas in Nairobi to celebrate the Mid-Autumn festival. I was invited by an acquaintance, who is a member of that religious group, even though I am not. At the gathering, I was asked by an older Chinese lady about what I was doing in Kenya. After I told her that I was doing my doctoral studies in literature in Germany, she asked me how old I was and whether I was married. When she found out that I was almost 30 years old and still single, she shook her head while leaning back and said, "So you're a real Third Mankind!" (Fieldnote, September 13, 2019).

The expression "third mankind" is a popular phrase used in China particularly to refer to female doctors outside of the binary division of two mankinds as in men and women. The name comes from gender stereotypes in China, that women are supposed to find someone older and more educated than themselves and stick to the gendered roles and divisions of labour and power. As it is more difficult for female doctors to find someone more educated than them and having a doctoral degree means an advanced age in the context where the late 20s are considered to be the deadline for getting married, female Doctors of Philosophy are not popular on the marriage market. This means to some extent being "left over" or out of the heterosexual marriage structure, which renders them to be the "Third Mankind", not feminine or masculine enough. Thus, being a single female with a doctoral degree is taken as a failure and a losing mark for the woman and her family. After the exclamation, the old woman advised me to get my head out of books to look around the world and doubted the value of studying humanities, especially literature, since this will not earn one much money.

This relates to the previous discussion of positionality. On one hand, as a Chinese person at a meeting with the majority being from China or having a Chinese heritage, I was under a Chinese gaze in the Chinese cultural context, despite how I position myself on the issue and where the conversation is spatially located. On the other hand, the discourse seems to reinforce my gender identity in relation to my education background. I was put under the gaze of a heterosexual patriarchal frame by the old woman who internalized the cultural structure. I am not aware of her educational background or marriage status, but clearly my gender identity together with my educational background were taken as negative factors for my marriage prospect. I regret that I did not pursue further to ask her where these ideas come from and how her life experience informs her about it. Clearly, she did not say this to upset me but really out of an auntly concern, but I missed the chance to continue the conversation and to find out more about her perspectives. What makes these two cases stand out is that they took place in Nairobi, but both are imbedded in a certain discourse that is popular within the Chinese cultural context.

5 Conclusion

My one-month fieldwork stay in Nairobi seemed to be short and cursory, but it did open a space to reflect on the dynamics, relationality and fluidity of positionality, which is more negotiated and constructed, which is opaque instead of blatantly intelligible and which seems to be mystified so that the fragmentation, disruption and undercurrents are made invisible. For literary scholars, being in the field is breathing the air, touching the soil and navigating the physical space, as well as an embodied approach of textual analysis and data collection. It can provide a deeper understanding in the careful reading of texts and offers an opportunity of collecting more cultural texts and archives for study. All these interactions and experience provide a tangible dimension and insight from a particular position that requires more thoughts into the polemic universality of representation and knowledge production. This also offers a way to glimpse inside the literary productions, which is creative and fictional, but which is also deeply entrenched in the everyday life and discourses, heavily influenced by capital and personnel movements and enhances or contradicts what is happening on the ground.

The aforementioned cases show how nationality, geographical positions, profession, gender and cultural context intersect and dynamically interact with each other, which are also the moments of reflection and regret that many questions remain unasked and unanswered. I find Rose's (1997: 317) argument useful due to her attention to the "fragmented space, webbed across gaps in understandings, saturated with power, but also, paradoxically, with uncertainty: a fragile and fluid net of connections and gulfs".

The misunderstanding, non-understanding and misinterpretation occurring or lost in the communication and (un)learning process in the field are the moments required of reflexivity. It also calls my attention towards both my own and my interlocutor's performativity of identity and position in our interactions, which creates gaps, absences and contradictions. As a beginning researcher in the field, almost without any previous training in research methodologies, this conceptualization of positionality gives me a space to reflect not only on the highlight of my fieldtrip but also on the failings, the lost chances and regrets that I had in the field, which were only discerned after the fieldtrip. It renders some confusing or unpleasant moments to be meaningful and revealing, which might not be deemed as useful data or contributions to the whole project. In this respect, Rose's reflections on positionality echoes with Lichterman's conceptualization of "interpretive reflexivity", which focuses

> on mistakes, gracelessness, hard-won insights, experiments in attribution, and other inter-cultural encounters whose outcomes may or may not correlate predictably with social position. Interpretive reflexivity tracks missed connections, lost opportunities to act differently by attributing meanings differently, as well as the ethnographer's little reality tests that get it right (Lichterman 2017:39).

All these gaps and fragmented moments of interactions show the opacity, complexity and dynamics of my own positioning and of my interlocutors'. This in a way constructs the relationship between me and the context and the relationship in turn constructs my positionality and deviation from the positionality that is often associated with identity category. Meanwhile, these interactions also reveal a multi-layered and nuanced understanding of China-Africa relations in everyday life, beyond the news and headlines steeped in a discursive and ideological contention.

New terminologies and paradigms are needed to capture these nuances and dynamics. Fieldwork does not only inform the analysis of literary texts but also the theoretical framing of my project, which is certainly not free from previous narratives but is also different and new from the simplified conceptualization of both sides.

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Fùjí Music in Contemporary Yorùbá Urban Spaces in Nigeria

Reflections from the Field

Oladapo Opeyemi Ajayi

1 Arriving in the Field

On July 31, 2018, I arrived in the city of Lagos from Bayreuth to commence a six- month fieldwork exercise as part of my research titled "Fújì Music and Everyday Life in Contemporary Yorùbá Urban Spaces in Nigeria". Unlike in the social sciences and natural sciences, fieldwork is not considered a first option in the humanities such as in literary studies. One is expected to extensively justify why and how fieldwork is relevant to one's research. The internal tension the idea of fieldwork evokes among early career researchers in the field of literary studies feeds into what Puri and Castillo (2015: 2) describe as the absence of "institutional consensus". As they explain further, early career researchers who choose fieldwork in literary studies might suffer some level of "institutional consequences" (ibid. 2015: 2). In spite of the dilemma on the potential consequences of my choice of fieldwork especially as it relates to my disciplinary situatedness, I found justification in: 1) the nature of my primary materials – since my research focuses on contemporary Yorùbá popular music genre, and as such I identify and use them as a cultural text;[1] 2) the nature of one of my research questions to explore how Fújì music is experienced in everyday Yorùbá Urban Spaces in Nigeria; 3) the aesthetics and spatial theories that I employ for my research analysis. In this regard, I am interested in the aesthetic experience of Fújì music.

[1] Barber (2007: 4) discusses text as one of the things societies produce, and one of the things people do.

The Fújì music genre became part of Yorùbá music repertoire in the early years of the 1960s, the period of Nigeria's independence from Britain. Fújì music started as Islamic music, which is performed in the context of Ramadan. From its inception, Fújì music is also performed in many other contexts that are connected to Islamic religious celebration and beyond. Fújì music is characterized by heterogeneity of both themes and rhythm. In this sense, it is flexible and draws intertextually from dissimilar sources like Yorùbá oral poetic forms and religious narratives (most especially Islam). Fújì music straddles both Yorùbá indigenous and neo-traditional vs popular music experience. The adaptable nature of the genre makes it appealing to different audience which cut across different socioeconomic classes and religions. Until recently, where there are more women participating in the performance of Fújì,[2] an average Fújì band is predominantly an all-male band with an identity which is typically formed around the image of a lead musician. The clear hierarchy dynamics between the lead musician and band members is described as an "embodied […] aural structure of Yorùbá popular music" (Waterman 1990:374). The lead musician is usually distinguished from the rest of the band in all things and at all time.

I opted for a multi-sited fieldwork in three Yorùbá speaking cities of Nigeria, which are Lagos, Ìbàdàn and Ìlorin. The cities of Lagos, Ìbàdàn and Ìlorin alongside other 33 cities in Nigeria are designated by law as capitals of their respective states. These capital cities are considered urban spaces – their urban status is derived in relation to the socio-economic realities of towns and villages (usually less populated in comparison with the capital cities). Notwithstanding, the following factors can be considered as markers and characteristics of the Nigerian capital cities or urban spaces: 1) commensurate level of public infrastructure, 2) sizeable population, 3) some degree of diversity amongst the population, and 4) identifiable patterns of class distinctions in neighborhoods and professional clusters. In this regard, capital cities in Nigeria are commercially viable centers with conspicuous presence of commerce, politics and cultures.

2 Self-Reflexivity: Fújì Music and Religion

This section explores my positionality as a researcher on Fújì music, especially as it relates to religion and social stratification. Fieldwork has been described as characterized by "typical subjective or personal experiences'' (Robben and Slukka 2012: 13). This argument strengthens how the process of self-reflexivity plays out in my reflection on the fieldwork process, even when my Yorùbáness and Nigerianess somewhat qualify me as an insider in the research field. There are other factors, which demand of me a further reflection on the implication of my positionality in relation to the research field.

My background from a Yorùbá Christian home implies that my socialization and in fact my aesthetic taste at the formative age is somewhat skewed to reflect the Yorùbá Christian community taste and orientation. This dynamic is relevant in the Yorùbá context, as there are

[2] Although women have been in related genre since 1950s. Klein (2020: 19) illustrates that "during the 1950s the fusion of indigenous Yorùbá and Islamic religious musical also produced gendered genre, influenced by the gender politics and belief systems of the Islamic tradition. One of the leading female Fújì musicians today is Modinat Àshàbí, popularly known as Barrymade.

strong communities of Christians, Muslims and Yorùbá traditionalists. Even though the society is a multi-religious space, sociocultural identities of worshippers in many ways reflect and influence their religious identity. This in turn implies that ways of life and certain practices are acquired in form of certain "cultural competence" or worldview. Since Fújì music, although secular is not merely regarded as Islamic, its peculiar vocal style and melismatic tone which is usually rendered through nasal timbre tone and constant reference to Quranic citations makes its identity Islamic (Klein 2019: 147). Thus, in retrospection, my Christian leanings have implicitly distanced me from Fújì music until I became independent enough to embrace the music genre.

3 Self Reflexivity: Fújì Music and Social Stratification

Towards the end of my six-month fieldwork in Nigeria in January 2019, I was in the company of four childhood friends. As usual, we were discussing Nigeria's politics and the upcoming general election in February. Part of the trending news we discussed was the incident that occurred at a political rally in the city of Lagos. During the campaign activities of the All Progressive Congress (APC) political party at a stadium in Lagos state, violence erupted among factions of the Road Transport Workers Union in Lagos. According to media reports, one of the union's leaders, Mr. Músílíù Akísányà, popularly known as MC Olúómo, suffered a critical injury on his neck. MC Olúómo was attacked on the musical stage of the popular Fújì musician Wasiu Ayinde alias Kwam1 at the political rally ground. All my friends believed MC Olúómo and Kwam1 are uneducated thugs. Indeed, it is a public knowledge that MC Olúómo's social relevance and prominence can be partly linked to the scale of violence and hooliganism that the union he leads perpetuates in the city of Lagos (fieldnotes, Ibadan, January 14, 2019).

The reference to some catgeories urban working class in a derogatory term like *thugs* is a common practice amongst the Yorùbá middle-class and educated populace. It is an opinion that is convenient on the surface but calls for a deeper reflection. The evening's passionate argument did not end without cautious remarks from my friends. In their words: "Dàpò, you need to be careful, it appears you have been spending too much time with these Fújì musicians in the name of your research." Although it was an innocent warning from friends, the statement has been strong enough to cause me to reflect on my position in relation to my field of study. In this regard, I begin the process of admitting positionality in the field as a Yorùbá, Christian, educated male. All of these play a huge role in my relation and interaction with Fújì music across time.

A researcher's position in the field, no doubt, is part of the uniqueness of the fieldwork (Ibrahim 2018). Indeed, my immersion into the world of Fújì via ethnography changes my perception of self, particularly in relation to the workings of social stratification in Nigeria. In this context, I became aware, and, feel differently about separation or distinct class differences of people – there is the class dynamics between working class versus educated class. There is also the dynamics in the religious communities. The most prominent in this context is between Christian and Muslim communities. However, Fújì is playing an important role in collapsing these entrenched divisions.

4 Lagos, Ìbàdàn and Ìlorin: The Nigerian Urban Spaces and Fújì Music

Cities and neighborhoods are often referenced in Fújì lyrics in form of self-praise by the musician or in relation to his subject of praise. Fújì musicians and their fans exhibit and express their sentiments in performances. As such, the cities of Ìbàdàn, Lagos and Ìlorin are prominent references in cities in Fújì lyrics. Amongst other factors, the two established figures in the Fújì canons Sikiru Ayinde Barrister and Kolawole Ayinla Kollington are from the cities of Ìbàdàn and Ìlorin respectively. However, the city of Lagos is a metropolis where most successful Fújì musicians live. This part focuses on how transformation of infrastructure in urban spaces is profoundly changing the way Nigerian experience their everyday soundscape.

Within the context of political discourse in Nigeria, Lagos and Ìbàdàn belong to the south-west geo-political zone of Nigeria. The two cities are described as “the urban hubs of Fújì music” in today’s Nigeria (Klein 2020: 2). Lagos city and state, until 1993, was Nigeria’s economic and political capital. It currently has an estimated population of over 18 million inhabitants while Ìbàdàn has over 3 million inhabitants. A road trip between Lagos and Ìbàdàn amounts to 129 kilometers. Unlike Lagos and Ìbàdàn, the city of Ìlorin presents an interesting cultural dynamic. Ìlorin is a multi-ethnic Yorùbá city with over one million inhabitants, its inhabitants comprise people of Yorùbá, Fulani, Hausa, Nupe and other minority groups. Scholars have described it as “a space of fusion of northern Islamic and Yorùbá Islamic cultures” (Peel 2016; Klein 2020).

As one of my research destinations, Ìlorin is particularly peculiar for the dominance of Yorùbá Islamic culture in the city - this Islamic religion and Yorùbá Islamic community are significant in the history of Fújì music. Klein (2020) describes Ìlorin as the home of Were music genre which is one of Fújì’s foundational genres. Ìlorin is also “renowned for its institution of higher education, [and] Quranic scholarship” (Klein 2020: 2). So, while Lagos (and Ìbàdàn) are tangential to Fújì music production, distribution and consumption, Ìlorin is crucial to the foundational development of the genre. An average Fújì musician is quick and passionate in declaring his place of origin. They often do this in the form Oríkì, the Yorùbá poetic praise form. They narrate their place of origin with a sense of allegiance and nostalgia. This is evident in their music and media interviews.

On the contrary and more often, places of origin play a secondary role in Fújì’s clientele network and their weekly performance destinations. The clientele network in this context is not fixed, it refers to a wide range of the musicians’ self-identified fans club, the musicians’ sponsors, and the audience at various performances. Even when they overtly reference or lay claim to certain neighborhoods, town, or city, Fújì musicians are in fact not confined to any space or territory. As such, one can allude that Fújì and its musicians have always been cosmopolitan when the idea is not so pronounced in African arts.

As I immersed myself into Fújì music bands and their performance during the fieldwork period, I soon realized the limitation of my choice of three cities even though the three cities remain viable as my research destinations. With regards to Fújì music, however, the three cities are intricately connected to other Yorùbá speaking cities at the level of performance frequencies and consumption rate. Fújì performances and associated activities overlap across cities, towns, and villages daily. A typical week for a Fújì musician means the possibility of performing between three to four days of the week in any city, town, or village across south-west Nigeria where there are consistent demands for the band. Thus, the scope of my research transcends beyond the initially projected cities of Lagos, Ìbàdàn and Ìlorin.

5 Further Reflections: The Changing Urban Yorùbá Landscape

As earlier discussed, the fieldwork enlightens and reveals new layers of reality. This is more important in relation to my personal background as a Yorùbá. In this section, I will further explore my personal reflection in relation to Fújì music and the contemporary public space of Lagos city. The narration of my personal encounters in the city and further reflections will set the motion to imagine Fújì music at the crossroad of changing times – some of which is partly anchored on urban renewal and infrastructure projects. The day after my arrival in the city of Lagos (August 1, 2018), I set out to commence my immersion into the city. According to my pre-fieldwork plan, I wanted to observe some motor-parks and neighborhoods in the selected cities. In the city of Lagos for example, I considered some markets and public spaces like Ojóta, Ojùèlègba, Obáléndé and Oshòdì. Apart from being accessible to the public, the motor-parks are also the main operating or work space for the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW). The transport workers union is informal and highly populated. Fújì musicians have strong affinity with the union

I am familiar with most of the selected public spaces in the cities of Lagos and Ìbàdàn because I have lived in the two cities before I travelled to Bayreuth for my studies. In this case, I considered and approached the spaces with seemingly familiar experiences and expectations. With my presumed background knowledge, I set out with some notions that were based on my knowledge of the spaces over the years. Even when it is not scientifically tenable, researchers are bound to make certain assumptions by relying on their human instinct prior to their arrival at the field, although Nyamnjoh (2013: 106) draws our attention to the debate of "scholarly obsession with defining a priori and then proceeding to observe".[3] However contentious this mode of scientific practice appears, it is still acknowledged as part of "basic human instinct" (Nyamnjoh 2013: 106). In this regard, and in my own case, I begin to admit to my own obsession prior to the field experience. I approached these spaces with both my instinct and knowledge of the spaces; therefore, I looked forward to what I considered as the unique characteristics of the spaces. Broadly speaking, I knew the spaces to be densely populated and marked by a high volume of informal economic activities.

Bearing in mind fully that sound is a defining feature in the Nigerian public space, its international link with everyday life in the public is part of my research interest. Sound interacts with human bodies at these spaces on several levels. Apart from the almost constant sound of vehicular movements and continuous horn blaring, there is a high emission of loud sounds from loudspeakers at different locations on the street. Hence, there is a good chance that a visitor is immersed in some dose of sound effect in these spaces. Music, being part of the experiences in these spaces is unsolicitedly consumed via the commuting buses and taxis. In other instances, there are record stores which are located across these spaces. The record stores in these public spaces are known for their imposing sounds, its effect usually spread across the space and its environs. The justification for the imposing sound in the space for an average record storeowner is the idea that every passerby is a potential customer.

[3] Nyamnjoh (2013) ascribes the debate on scholarly obsession before field observation to some earlier works like Gupta and Ferguson (1992; 1997) and Keesing (1994).

While the genre, style, and thematic focus of music one encounters at the public spaces varies, one can attempt to map a pattern or make sense of the choice of music in a particular time or season. As such, one can look forward to encountering “new releases”, especially the ones that have gone viral. It is also not out of place to encounter songs addressing the relevance of different days of the week and/or season (Mondays and Weekends, Christian and Muslim festivities), or those that address a topical societal issue like current affairs, and sports. I approached the spaces in anticipation of a familiar experience concerning the presence of record stores. However, such anticipation disappears in the face of ongoing government urban renewal projects. The city of Lagos in particular, like many capital cities in Nigeria, have for several years witnessed, and are still witnessing considerable changes. As new infrastructure emerges, the old infrastructure and known spaces are undergoing re-modelling and re-organization. In this case, public facilities and public spaces like motor parks and markets are emerging. These structures disturb the landscapes and transform them from the familiar to unfamiliar, evoking new experiences, and vice-versa. The new development challenged my so-called insider’s position and assumptions. This is in relation to my personal memory of the public spaces in question, especially as part of my Fújì music experience is anchored around these spaces. Thus, the emergence of more permanent buildings in the spaces in the form of shopping complexes or/and iron barricades challenge the long-standing experience of these spaces. The make-shift shops are not just substandard structures, but rather symbolize a class constellation and representation of multiple realities, i.e., an urban space which accommodates and acknowledges the rich and not rich enough, the consumers of Fújì music and any other musical genres.

What is at stake in this context? Several low-income activities in the Lagos public space continue to give way to a middle-class oriented experience. This development is not entirely innocent in the context of what can be considered as an aesthetic taste that is class-based, defined or regulated. Fújì music is no doubt closer to the Yorùbá working community, and a displacement of these communities technically threatens the stability of class-based culture and experience. The record stores and other informal outlets in the neighborhoods of Ojóta and Ojùèlègba constitute a part of the distribution network, which Fújì music relied on in the past decades. They are not only organic but also guarantee an important role in curating the Fújì music culture into the collective consciousness of Yorùbá/Nigeria urban dwellers. The affected makeshift record stores in this context are not just small business outlets; rather they have always been part of an ecosystem of Fújì music’s network.

As the make-shift shops and stalls continue to give way to newer and permanent structures at the motor-parks and markets in today’s Nigerian urban cities, small businesses like retail record stores are displaced and fast disappearing in such spaces. As a result of their displacement and other economic condition, most record owners are forced to target passersby at the traffic congested routes. In essence, record stores fall into these categories of small-scale business whose owners are not able to afford the new shops. However, to avoid the pitfall of a narrow justification for a threatened urban spatial experience, which the displacement of most record stores in the Yorùbá urban space in Nigeria symbolizes, I also reflect on the implication of the emergence of another urban-based popular music known as Afro-beats and Afro-pop.

6 Afro-beats and Naija-pop: The New Kid in the Yorùbá Urban Space

It is no exaggeration to claim that there is a sudden surge of interest of global attention on the contemporary Nigerian music scene, especially the Afro-beats and Naija-pop genres. These musical genres are largely driven by the millennials and Gen Z and they have not only gained global prominence through series of international collaborations and awards.[4] This story is also true for the Nigerian movie industry, Nollywood, whose global boom precedes the popular music experience. However, the success of this genre of Nigerian music both locally and globally has a multi-dimensional effect on the everyday experience of the urban Yorùbá space in Nigeria. The aspect of the local dynamics of Afro-beats in relation to Fújì music is what this part attempts to bring to fore by way of further reflecting on my fieldwork experience. Clifford (1988:119) sheds more light on the role of fieldwork concerning knowledge production when he refers to the experience as "production of knowledge from an intense intersubjective engagement". This part discusses how the demography of the urban-based Yorùbá working class community who self-identify as Fújì fans and are often mobilized by Fújì musicians as a primary constituent in the last decades is gradually becoming the group which the Afro-beats and Afro-pop singers also cultivate as core constituents. Because of my daily encounters with Fújì, it begun to occur to me that there is a significant demography and generation of music consumers who grew up largely on the new Afro-pop genre. Afro-pop and Afro-beats even as a new genre straddles intergenerational representation of African music experience; this is through its combination and cross-referencing of genres across the African continent.

The fieldwork did not only illuminate my perspectives on the sound and rhythm experience of the urban Yorùbá/Nigerian space. The fieldwork becomes more productive for me to further reflect on Fújì experience through other material forms. They come in the forms of stickers, paintings, graffiti, and vehicular inscriptions amongst others. They are symbolic vocabularies that are invoked by the new experiences of Afro-pop/Afro-beats. Fújì genre is prominent amongst the multiple forms of non-verbal expressions in the urban space of Lagos. Before the emergence of the Afro-pop genre in the mid-1990s, Fújì musicians were one the most prominent icons on the street in the Yorùbá speaking cities of Nigeria. Fújì musicians across generations are popular and highly revered amongst the working-class operating in the informal economic sectors of Yorùbá speaking cities. Even when there are evident images of military presidents, religious figures, and civilian political figures in the iconographies one encounters in these cities, none of them matches the level of acceptability of Fújì musicians.

During my research in the 2010s, I observed the presence of non-verbal and iconic images of new Afro-beats and Naija-pop artists that are significant enough to either rival or complement the dominant Fújì representational experience. Since Fújì appeals to a large demographic of Yorùbá working class, Fújì musicians often boast of their acceptance on the street. The street as a core constituent of Fújì is often self-evident in the everyday urban experience. There is a strong appeal for Fújì music amongst the working-class people in the informal sectors of the Yorùbá urban spaces.

[4] During the 2021 Grammy award edition, the best Global music Album was awarded to Oludamini Ebunoluwa Ogulu alias Burna Boy for his Album titled "Twice as Tall" (2020).

Although, the “street” is a term usually referenced by Afro-beats singers to refer to core fans, the term when deployed in the urban Yorùbá space further complicates the debate and opens up a new reality. This is about the genres reach to a wider audience of non-Yorùbá speakers. Its reach to a wider audience is made partly possible through the adoption of English and Pidgin, unlike Fújì music, which is primarily in the Yorùbá language. It is therefore not surprising that the contemporary Afro-beats and Naija-pop artists have a large followership in the urban space of Yorùbá. In essence, the non-verbal experience of Fújì music in the contemporary Yorùbá urban space overlaps with the contemporary Afro-beats and Naija-pop’s experience. The fieldwork further brings to fore the dynamics in Nigeria’s contemporary music scene where there is intertwined relationship and interaction between a relatively newer genre of Afro-beats and Fújì music.

7 Fújì and the Invention of New Vocabularies in Words and Slangs

This section builds on the earlier argument that discusses Fújì music as continuum of urban experiences. It brings the reflection on Fújì music and my fieldwork experience closer to myself. In fact, this part further teases out my insider’s perspective in the field. Raji-Oyelade (2012: 27) discourages any approach, which assumes “fixity of forms” since it contradicts the ideas of “dynamisms of societies and cultures”. In this sense, Fújì music as a text form usually responds and contributes to the societal cultures' experiences of dynamism. Pasuma is a stage name for a Lagos based popular Fuji musician Wasiu Alabi. Pasuma came to limelight in the early 1990s. Amongst his popular works is an album titled *Òròbòkibo*, which was released around 1995/96. The story of Pasuma’s *Òròbò* or *Òròbòkibo* is a signifier of what Fújì has been in defining and mediating the contemporary Yorùbá’s everyday experiences. The two terms are paradigmatic of how Fújì music contributes to the urban Yorùbá language vocabulary and experience.

In Yorùbá, the term *Òròbò* means “extra-large”. As such, a 50cl of Coca-Cola is referred to as *Coke-Òròbò* (extra-large bottle of coke). In addition, a big polythene bag is described as *nylon-Òròbò* (the extra-large nylon). This is also true for humans: a chubby man can be colloquially described as *brother-Òròbò* (a chubby man*)*, while his female counterpart will be colloquially referred to as *sister-Òròbò* (a plump woman). Similarly, the phrase *Òròbò-kibo* is a vulgar slang, which translates and describes an act of sexual penetration. Thus, Pasuma’s usage of the slangs in his songs, paint a graphic connotation of how Fújì music didactically reflect the everyday life experience in words and slangs. In essence, urban slangs like *Òròbò-kibo* are part of how Fújì music contributes to contemporary language. Fújì musicians do not only create words, they escalate them as viral slangs in their music.

Fújì music as a genre whose “experimental versifications” often transform aspects of Yorùbá spoken language by creating the “aesthetics of funk” (Raji-Oyelade 2012: 88)[5]. The Fújì musician, Pasuma like his other counterparts have played a significant role in redefining contemporary Yorùbá language experiences. This aspect which feeds into the youth and urban culture are recognizable on several levels. The urban experiences are sometimes revealed and mediated

[5] Raji-Oyelade’s (2012) work “Post-proverbial as Archetypes of Modernity” discusses a sub type of Fújì genre and lyrics which contains “habitually seed, inventive and banal” language.

through new urban slangs in Fújì music. The role of Fújì musicians in this regard is partly described as being "graphically revisionist". This situation is said to contribute to today's "crisis of linguistic competence as well as freedom of verbal play" for Yoruba language speakers, especially those in the urban spaces (Raji-Oyelade 2012: 89).

8 Conclusion

The main objective of this research is to reflect on the fieldwork experience from the perspective of an early career researcher in literary studies. This perspective pursued is seen through the lens of Fújì music. I arrived at the conclusion that fieldwork irrespective of one's disciplinary leanings has its own voice that is always important to consider and incorporate in a research. Fieldwork becomes particularly relevant because, more often, what one perceives or imagines outside or before the field experience may differ from the emerging reality from the field. This is evident and demonstrated in the section which explored the impact of the urban renewal project on Fújì music. In order to understand the popular culture of urban spaces, it is essential to gather lived experiences. The field draws one's attention to the emerging phenomenon of the new Afro-beats genres, especially as it relates to the older genre of Fújì music. As one maneuvers the lived experiences, the emerging data challenges one's perspective of history even as an insider. Unlike literary studies methods which demand a close reading of text for one's analysis usually from a distant place of imagination, fieldwork not only affords the researcher to bring on board one's perception of text, it also permits an appraisal opportunity for both conventional fixed text and the emerging text (narratives) from everyday lifeworlds. The instance of new vocabularies might have emerged differently if I relied solely on lyrical analysis. However, fieldwork enabled me to track how lyrics become part of embodied text in everyday context. Furthermore, fieldwork allows the researcher to acknowledge and embrace one's position. In fact, it enables the researcher, alongside Fújì practitioners, consumers and fans to become a character in the field. The lens of reflection turns on the researcher in ways where one should also reflect on one's situatedness in the multi layers of social dynamics.

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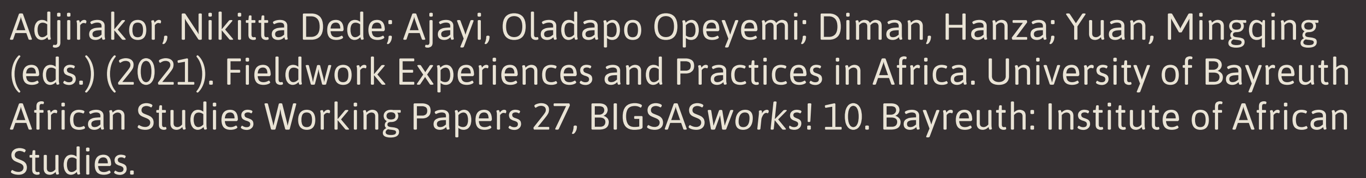

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