



Methodology under Duress: our discussions so far

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Is there a **relationship** between social and political **change** and the ICT revolution in **Africa**?

How is the ICT revolution changing the social fabric under **duress** at the level of

- (i) decision making and empowerment;
- (ii) community formation (both social and political) and related feelings of belonging and trust; and
- (iii) power relations?

What are the limits and possibilities for **agency** in a situation of duress and new ICT and will this lead to new processes of **in-** and **exclusion**?

Is the **emic** understanding of **conflict**, i.e. duress, changing with the advancement of **social media** and **ICT**?

What have we done in the programme concerning methodology?

- Workshops and their main conclusions: comparative methodology; what data do we gather?
- Interdisciplinarity: anthropology and history
- Research under duress:
 - ➔ How does a researcher relate to the field (trust);
 - ➔ networks under duress, and how to study
- Anthropological methods: senses and visuals

Methodology

Methodological issues have been extensively discussed throughout the first year of the project 'Connecting in Times of Duress'. We have organized several workshops in which we have talked about a variety of aspects of our research methodology, like doing research in societies in the proximity of conflict, anthropology of the senses and network approached research in conflict.

Interdisciplinarity

'History, the last things before the last'

(Kracauer, 1969)

History and anthropology can use the same methods:

- Oral history
- Ethnography (in the archives!)

We started off the discussion of methodology with a workshop on doing research in societies under duress. The idea was mostly to speak about our own, sometimes vulnerable, position in the fields that we study. We spoke about our safety in societies in which conflict, violence and issues of (dis)trust are always present. Experiences and best practices to keeping ourselves safe were discussed. Lotje de Vries, who did fieldwork in South Sudan, spoke about her experiences in this highly insecure field. She explained how she was able to get close, yet remained a distance, to (military) officials by playing chess with them for example. Not only did this grant her security, it also helped her do her research. Margot Leegwater spoke about the emotional effects of doing research in societies under duress. Her experience in Rwanda, where distrust among her respondents and towards her affected her mental state tremendously, helped us discuss about our own psyche and how we deal with the possible emotional challenges we face in the field. Lotje's advice to write a safety protocol before entering the field has been adopted by the team. This protocol contains copies of our passports and visa, our itinerary and an 'evacuation plan'. In our fields we work with contact persons that we can trust and these contacts are also mentioned in the safety protocol. For our mental security we keep contact with the team in Holland on a regular basis to reflect. Those that are going to a difficult field in terms of violence have the opportunity to make an appointment with a specialized psychologist before and/or after the fieldwork.

Emotions and senses returned on the discussion table when we all came back from our first fieldwork. In some of the fields we entered we noticed that interviews and observation alone were not enough to understand society. Duress could be translated as the 'experience of conflict/hardship' and experiences are not expressed in words alone. Emotions, like fear, anxiety, paranoia, anger and distrust, but also joy, being full of the spirit, excitement, etc. make up an important part of this experience. To understand these emotions we need more sensorial tools in the field than only eyes and ears. What about touch and smell? These were the things we discussed in November when Francis Nyamnjoh discussed his experience with the anthropology of the senses with us. We spoke about hierarchies in the senses: why are hearing and observing as accepted in anthropological methodologies, but senses like smell and touch are still somewhat controversial. Could a blind man do ethnography? We concluded that emotions and senses should be part of our research methodology, that without it we cannot understand duress. Most of the researchers in the group already use their senses in their fieldwork and describe more than what they hear and see in their fieldwork diaries. But to understand better the value of all senses, we have agreed on doing an exercise during our workshop in Buea. The team will be split up in groups of two and go to a field (a church service for example) in which they each use one of their senses. The results will be discussed after the exercise and we hope that this will give us a deeper understanding of the importance of the different senses in our fields.

Our last workshop was organized around the theme of network approached research in conflict areas. As we are living in a globalized world, where people are evermore (digitally) connected, our research fields have become fluid. We are no longer doing an ethnography of a confined place: our fields go far beyond that. Informants have family and friends around the globe to whom they connect and networks expand. When we come back from the field in Africa, we are still connected to our fields through the use of social media and mobile phones. News from conflict areas, like the Central African Republic, reaches us every day. Central to this workshop was the question how to approach this 'new' fluid field. The idea was to think of networks as the basis of our respective projects. It is believed that conflict in Africa is nowadays very much based on networks: (rebel) groups connect to each other over large distances, allowing them to adopt new strategies of war and violence. Judith Verweijen spoke about her own experiences with these networks of rebels in East Congo and agreed that following a network is important in understanding everyday Africa society, especially in regions under duress. Following a network includes following their online activities on Facebook and Twitter, and their connections through phone calls and text messages. It means that we have to be extremely flexible in approaching our field. By following networks instead of doing ethnography in a confined place, we can end up in different regions and different fields

than expected. Our field is much broader: not only in the physical sense, but also in terms of time and online ethnography. Even when we are at home we are still part of the field, as we have become part of the networks ourselves. How do we deal with this? Can we find a balance between always being in the field and working on a dissertation for example? And how do we assure that we do not become too attached to highly controversial networks, like rebel groups in Congo DR and the Central African Republic.

Which methods do we use?

Biography of individuals, family, networks, institutes:

- Participant Observation
- Interview
- Senses
- Visuals: film and photography
- Internet
- Interrelation of these methods; triangulation
- Survey? Which quantitative data do we need?