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Violence in the Field

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1. Methodological Challenges in South African Townships

In South Africa today public discourses still view the township areas basically through the lens of crime and poverty. The most visible difference between residential areas is the security constructions structuring urban spaces, which obviously relate to the income of its residents (and define the boundaries between public/accessible and private/gated). In the middle income area people secure their houses with fences, gates and double locks while in the lower income areas there is no security distance between house doors and street; here houses are directly accessible from the street. But conditions in townships are far from uniform. Even within the township residents differentiate between the middle income area which is seen as safer, and the low income area which is described as less safe. Another aspect of drawing the boundaries of townships is implied in the prevailing conceptualisations that are directly related to racially defined identities. People perceive townships either as what is known as coloured or black African dominated neighbourhoods whereas the better off areas in general are still distinguished as white.

The relatively homogenous composition of these residential areas is a relict of apartheid's policies which can be traced back to many pieces of legislation enacted over the years dating from colonialism to apartheid.¹ During apartheid townships were built as dormitory 'suburbs' for working class people and are dominated by what is still known as either black African or coloured population groups. Apartheid's policy of forced removals in the 1960's played a prominent role in the segregation processes according to racialised categories where 'non-whites' were removed from urban centres to urban peripheral regions (Western 1996). The Group Areas Act introduced in the 1950s two years after the National Party (NP) took over in 1948, doubtlessly heralded a new era particularly for classified Coloureds and Indians. At that time only those categorised as Coloureds and Indians had legal authorisation to reside in the urban centres notably of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban. Approximately 600 000 Coloureds and Indians were forcibly removed from the downtown areas to the outskirts.

¹ In the mid-19th century the foundation for the legal paradigm of forced segregation was laid in the Eastern Cape (Pincock 1989: pp.23). It was deepened by the Natives Urban Act, passed in 1923 that allowed municipalities to remove black Africans from the cities (Maylam 1995: pp. 34). In 1945 the Blacks (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act only gave permission for permanent urban residence to those black Africans born in urban areas or working therein by a specific period of time or who were dependent spouse or child of a qualified worker. The majority of Black Africans without this permission in their pass books (dompas) were not allowed to spend more than seventy-two hours in the city centres (Seekings/Nattras 2006: pp. 103)

Thereby, as a direct consequence of the Group Areas Act residential areas were proclaimed and constructed according to racial categories as either white, coloured or black African neighbourhoods (Western 1996: pp. 72). The Pass Laws were also tightened in 1953 (Seekings/Nattras 2006: pp. 103). Hence the re-location measures at this point in time did not affect the majority of black Africans who were not allowed to reside in urban centre anyway. They were forced to stay behind in the rural areas conceptualised as homelands. The marginalisation processes affecting black Africans had started much earlier and culminated with the Homeland Act in 1959 intended to direct politics of separate spatial development (see Western (1981: pp.72).

The transition from Apartheid towards a democratic system is associated with the first fair and free democratic election of 1994. It is generally regarded as successful despite the permanent ongoing conflicts (Meyns 2000). The current conflicts reflect the historical structures that excluded the “non-white” population groups from the apartheid state system governed by “white” Afrikaaners. The persistent conflict in South Africa between non-white and white population groups is more complex in the Western Cape Province because so called coloureds are in the majority². The current government states that one of its major aims with regard to democratisation is to overcome these racialised boundaries and to integrate the disadvantaged population groups by providing them with equal access to resources such as employment and education within South African society (Wittmann 2001).

In a politically highly polarised and (newly) racialised environment like the townships and embedded in extremely precarious and violence-prone socio-economic conditions, access to the field itself posed a challenge. My fieldwork was driven by the circular research process of collecting, coding, comparing data which required constant negotiation between the position of being an observer and that of an active and complicit participant. In the research process violence turned out to be one core category. This discovery helped me to structure the data collection and analysis and particularly to understand the field sites (Strauss/Corbin 1996: pp. 94). The core category violence is chosen here as a focal point to show how I systematically developed perspectives on my field sites (Strübing 2008: pp. 23). Thus, the purpose of this paper in discussing methodological challenges is three-fold: I begin with reflections on the epistemological approach of social constructionism and how it relates to the ethnographic methodology of research in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. Secondly, I then discuss my position as researcher within the precarious field sites. I examine the problems

²This is due to the declaration of Cape Province in 1954 as a ‘coloured preference area’ by the apartheid government which severely restricted the migration of black African workers (Terreblanche 2002).

that I encountered during my fieldwork, interacting with various antagonistic and opposing social actors like party politicians and community activists. Following this I shed light on the aspect of violence that in the form of narratives, intimidation and actual physical violence was a constant presence in the field and that clearly showed a crucial gender dimension. To conclude I reflect on how the points I discussed interrelated to frame the way I was doing ethnography.

2. Perspectives on ‘Doing Democracy’

The research required a methodological approach that allowed for the empirical study of local constructions of “democracy”, “development” and “identity” and was guided by the principles of Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory is a general method of comparative analysis (Glaser/Strauss 1999 (1967): p. 1) representing a systematic and transparent process of research and data interpretation. The discovery of theory grounded in the collected data themselves is one of its main characteristics and refers to a process of analysis generating empirical generalisations. This “*means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of research (6). Also theory itself has to be understood as a process, that is[...]theory [concepts] as an ever-developing entity, not a perfect product*” (Glaser/Strauss 1999 (1967): pp. 6, pp. 32). In accordance with Glaser/Strauss (1999 (1967): pp. 16) everyday reality in my research areas, Landfield and Fairlady, is studied from a phenomenological perspective in the form of the social construction of concepts and categories embedded in life-worlds and settings of political actors (Schütz 1975 (1932); Berger/Luckmann 1980 [1966]). The approach made it possible to carve out the various dimensions of the processes of social construction of democracy and identity and more precisely to reveal perceptions that are expressed in everyday language, i.e. in emic categories.

The leading question of my research has been how do differently positioned actors make sense of and attribute meaning to notions of local democracy and development?. In the course of my research I engaged with a variety of actors. This gave me the opportunity to interview 34 women and 33 men³, reams of (informal) conversations and to participate in 64 socio-

³ Because my research topic was on democratisation I dealt with development project managers, bureaucrats, and elite members of the community such as ward councillors – all people who are accustomed to efficient use of their time. So I often encountered situations where I only had one chance to interview someone. For instance some of the interviewees such as the Urban Renewal Manager of Landfield limited my interview time because of his work related to other commitments. I had the experience that semi structured interviewing in these cases was best and I prepared my interview guide with the relevant questions in advance (see Russel 1994: pp. 209). In these time limited interview situations I was eager to prolong the research situation as long as possible. This meant that my questions had to keep the person being interviewed curious and entertained to an extent. One way

political events in a wide range of settings (city council meetings in Cape Town, sub council meetings in Landfield and Fairlady, educational workshops organised by NGOs etc.).

My field research has been structured by interactions in specific kinds of situations that are embedded in the democratisation process. I would like to clarify the notion of *doing Democracy* that I used above which derives from an ethnomethodological perspective developed by Garfinkel. Garfinkel's theory concentrates on social practices and methods that interactively structure everyday life and its social order (1967). Garfinkel conceptualises practices and methods as communicative agency through which social actors make themselves accountable to each other thereby maintaining social order. Like Garfinkel I rationalise social practices as "the routine grounds of everyday practices" (1972 [1964]), situated in the more or less "invariant but unnoticed background of everyday life" (1967: pp. 118), but explicitly related to everyday activities that develop and involve democratisation in interactional situations. For instance the ethnomethodological perspective is interested in what lawyers do, which methods they apply in order to be perceived in their functions of acting in the name of law (Garfinkel 1967: pp. 104). Thus this approach is concerned with the general procedures by which common knowledge of *being a ward councillor or being a gangster* and social reality is constantly (re)-produced, and shared by actors (Bergmann 1998: pp. 22). In my field research I used to some extent the ethnomethodological perspective on agency, guided by an interest in what characterises the activities involved in being ward councillors in contrast to being NGO activists in different political contexts of democratisation. For instance, in their efforts to access certain resources it became evident that local politicians and political activists perform differently. However we must confront the epistemological problem defined by Attewell (1974) "*if meaning and action depend upon context [i.e. situated], how can any meaning be understood across contexts and be made shareable[...]One can have no complete understanding of social action out of context*" (Attewell 1974: pp. 185). This is why the study focused above all on the competing social construction of democratisation, through situated negotiation of meaning (often conflictive), that takes place among communal politicians and among political activists (see Lachenmann 2008: pp. 59).

I, therefore, interviewed a range of respondents such as political activists, officials, party politicians, community workers, NGO employees and ordinary people, on the same issues,

of doing so was to discuss recent local events and scandals or to provoke the interviewee in order to break the expected course of conversation (Lachenmann, Methods Seminar WS 2004).

and I participated in events where these different actors met at interfaces (Long 1993). During the entire period of shared lived experiences, the empirical data were constantly contextualised and compared with the help of document analysis (Glaser/Strauss 1998 [1967]:176-183) of newspaper articles, NGO publications, legal documents, police files, governmental statistics and publications, white papers and relevant academic literature. This means that interview data was actually verified and compared with observation and media data and vice versa, i.e. by triangulation (Olivier de Sardan 2008: pp. 70-72; Steinke 2004: pp. 320; Lachenmann 1995: pp. 11; Gupta 1995: pp. 377). Combining interviews with participant observation of various everyday situations allowed me to focus particularly on the way various social identities, including racialised and gender ascriptions, are actualised in these interactions. In this regard stereotyped replies were of particular interests when interviewees and informants expressed beliefs shaped by racial ideologies, gender constructs as well as appropriate relations. For instance, this turned out to be the case when respondents talked about behaviour and rights in the specific contexts that they consider to be essential when defining women and men (see also Francis 1993: pp. 98).

By conducting interviews, situations were created where different political actors reconstructed their representations of social action and culture. To widen the spectrum it was essential to observe these political actors *in situ*, to see how ward councillors perform in sub council meetings or council meetings or how NGO activists educate and train communities on crime prevention. I stayed flexible with the methodological suggestion of first observing social action in order to preserve its natural progression and only with the second step analysing observation data with the help of informants (see Bergmann 2007: pp. 47-48; Meyer 2009: pp. 14). My experience was that interviewing participants before an event could also sharpen my observation of issues which were tackled by interviewees and informants in conversations (see Bernard 1995). This is especially true when it came to sharing intimate details such as the love affairs of public persons, crime related activities, corruption and intrigues which I shall summarize as gossip. As a researcher I experienced how my fieldwork opened up social space which appeared as “a convenient environment for gossip” to local politicians, political activists and other inhabitants of Landfield and Fairlady (see Bergmann 1993: pp. 77). In this respect the effect of sharing gossip with me as an outsider crystallised, on the one hand, as an occasion to gather information about the communities which at first glance would not have been accessible to me as a newcomer. On the other hand, it allowed focusing the lens for further observation and making my perspective more sensitive to grasping the social dynamics rooted in gossip. The ongoing procedure of observing the field

provided the opportunity to regularly triangulate the gossip data. It helped me to delve deeper into social relations. Thus gossip has been “ethnographically instrumentalised and inventoried” (Bergmann 1993: pp.5, 9) as a way of generating and gaining new perspectives on the field⁴.

Most interviews lasted for around two hours although I collected some life histories with some individuals over the course of several interviews. This required establishing frequent contacts with interviewees and informants in order to reconstruct and analyse extended cases. Some typical trajectories of people who have been actively trying to shape the process of re-interpreting “democratisation” are part and parcel of the elaboration of extended cases. This approach allowed me to present contrasting case studies and to develop typologies (Lachenmann 2010: pp. 20, 23). The ongoing procedure of data comparison and reconciliation of research interests during a certain period of time corresponds to what is expressed by the term *extended case methodology* (Burawoy 1998; Bergmann 2007; Meyer 2009). The *extended case methodology* was first conceptualised by the Manchester School founded by Max Gluckman in the 1940s but has been ever practiced since British social anthropology was first established in the 1920’s (Olivier de Sardan 2008: pp.73). In regard to the selection and demarcation of research areas, trajectories and cases structuring the process of doing ethnography, I pursued what Marcus (1995) defined in his approach „[...] *When the thing traced is within the realm of discourse and modes of thought, then the circulation of signs, symbols and metaphors guides the design of ethnography. This mode involves trying to trace the social correlates and groundings of associations that are most clearly alive in language use and print or visual media*“ (Marcus 1995: pp108). Adopting this approach I combined and triangulated the different sources of information such as interviews, events, newspaper articles, TV broadcasts, and archive studies. Considering these sources of information, I especially focused on communal politicians and members of social movements including NGOs. I thereby sought to learn more about their respective political careers as well as their experiences in establishing democratic structures such as the ward committees. I was, moreover, paying particular attention to what democracy means to them in everyday life, to their views on service delivery (housing) and how different actors related to each other.

Based on this actor centred perspective the research aimed at developing concepts and generalisations grounded in empirical data gained in a circular research process (Glaser and Strauss 1998(1967)). The method of comparative analysis between groups and areas - i.e.

⁴ In my dissertation gossip is systematically analysed as a platform to racialise and politicise and to an extent even to control the other.

between so called coloured and black African people, between Landfield and Fairlady, between middle and low income areas within the Landfield area etc. – is crucial for analysing concepts of democratisation. In revealing differences and similarities between groups and areas at particular interface situations I developed categories and concepts, relationships and modes of interactions. By framing data particularities, as well as more general aspects, important dimensions structuring everyday life were explored. The interrelated dimensions of identity such as gender and racialised belonging and party membership emerged as the relevant process of comparative analysis with regard to different research areas. Through this circular research process of collecting, coding, comparing (triangulation) and analysing data, leading questions and concepts were developed further in order to frame data and generate generalisations. For example, at the very beginning, I selected *crime* as a category because it was mentioned in interviews, events, local newspapers and informal conversations again and again. Subsequently I analysed *crime* in relation to concepts of democracy, gender and racialised identity and communities in Landfield and Fairlady. This process then led me to research the different concepts of crime guided by additional questions such as how the meaning of crime is negotiated between community residents, local *gangsters* and their respective ward councillors. How do *gangsters*, in comparison to ward councillors, interact with ward residents? Furthermore who is considered to be responsible for safety and security? Through this procedure violence appeared as one core category framing the research methodology (see next page) and at the same time confronting limits and structuring fieldwork (see page 13).

3. Relating to Research Partners in a Precarious Setting

Doing field research meant applying methods in order to make myself accountable to the field site as someone who is interested in how people practice democratisation. Over time the two township communities figured out my identity as a researcher as they saw me participating in most events dedicated to aspects of democratisation and talking to diverse people about related issues. At the beginning people started to relate me to political gatherings and also to the explicit purpose that I seemed to reflect as a researcher, last but not least as someone who was new to the scene. At the beginning of research in Fairlady people often talked about my German identity as an outsider for instance in relation to a programme financed by the German Technical Co-operation on Urban Conflict Management⁵ in Fairlady with whose

⁵ This programme includes a Community Peace Worker (CPW) service from and for the inhabitants of the settlements, as well as the promotion of training and employment. In each area the CPWs are selected from a pool of interested unemployed young people. They obtain basic training in life skills and conflict management (see Seminar für Ländliche Entwicklung (ed.) (2003).

collaborators I had research relations. Additionally my German identity gave me the option of being perceived as a foreigner who cannot be held responsible for political decisions such as water cut-offs. My position as an outsider always provoked the curiosity of insiders and their ambition to introduce their knowledge and opinions to me as a person not having shared their experience of living under the apartheid regime (see Francis 1993; Schramm 2005).

In order to work with different political actors, I needed to emphasise my position as a researcher who does not take sides with any political party. The research areas of Landfield and Fairlady are divided into two main political factions. The majority of coloureds voted in the first two democratic elections for the *New National Party* (NNP) which had introduced apartheid through its predecessor, the National Party. The majority of the black African population groups voted for the *African National Congress* (ANC), the former liberation movement (Pickel 1997; Jensen 2001; Reddy 2001). Despite the fact that the NNP suffered a devastating loss in the last parliamentary election in 2004 and directly after that dismantled their party structure (Schwikowski 2004), the majority of coloureds in Landfield voted in this most recent election for the NNP. Thus the necessity of staying impartial is rooted in my research interest of delving into different orientations and competitive ideas of actors. Therefore, to do qualitative empirical research in this setting it was paramount to establish relationships of mutual trust with differently situated actors. A decisive moment in the process of gaining trust and building up mutual recognition in the township communities was when I took up residency with working class families, not politically active, in two different wards of Landfield whom I got to know through a friend who had grown up in Landfield. I experienced how people from both townships expressed their appreciation that I lived among them which reduced, to a certain extent, the social distance between myself as a stranger and the township inhabitants. Moreover the research involved a long process of gaining the political actors' acceptance which in my case included constantly proving my integrity as a researcher and the need to explain continuously that I myself do not have particular party preferences. In the beginning people were asking me which party I actually belong to, as they saw me being accepted by representatives of different parties and organisations. But later though, when it came to discussing party programmes on the establishment of the death penalty or the prohibition of abortion and homosexuality I showed my colours. Thus I deliberately took no side with any political party but positioned myself in regard to human rights. In such circumstances I couldn't remain 'neutral' and uninvolved in matters such as discrimination just like no one would ask Amnesty International to be neutral in reporting state sanctioned torture (see Bernard 1994: pp. 153).

In the process of doing ethnography I came to understand structures of relevance in the field as well as unexpected lines of tension and conflict. In the advanced stage of data collection I started to realise that relevant dimensions framing the preliminary outlines of my thesis could be understood through the reconstruction and analysis of life trajectories of political actors. These trajectories opened up important new perspectives for contextualising these dimensions and identifying significant biographical continuities and disruptions of party political affiliation, engagement with the local state, political motherhood etc.. In this respect the building up of stable and longstanding relationships with political actors was of major importance. This implied establishing co-operative relationships with people and integrating them into the research process as partners. First, the research partners were gatekeepers and brokers (Olivier de Sardan 2005: pp. 166-184) who facilitated my local knowledge particularly at the beginning of the research when I was challenged by the need to avoid being identified with typical positions and ideas. And secondly in order to pursue the methodological aim of reconstructing the life trajectories of political actors it was necessary to create a durable contact which allowed delving into their social milieu of practices and interactions.

I was particularly careful to make sure that my access to the field was through differently positioned local contacts within local government, social movements and the NGO sector. I didn't bond with any particular key informant in field work who would have been in the position of decisively influencing the process of my research (see Galizia/Schneider 2001: pp. 10). This was also due to the need to maintain the autonomy of my position as a researcher within the highly politicised field. Fortunately I was able to build up close relationships with several different political actors which as a result of my multi-perspective approach and the need to delve into different political actors' trajectories (see Marcus 1998; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2003: pp. 3, 10; Lachenmann 2008: pp. 59; Lachenmann 2010: pp. 21)).

I want to now pin down three different types of relationships I entered into with research partners at the very beginning of fieldwork. These types confronted the research with structures of political everyday life and challenged the methodology.

The 'messy' type represents the kind of relationships that allowed me to get acquainted with and be personally involved in messiness. I met a political activist from the *Resisting Eviction Movement* (REM), Isaak, immediately after a workshop on accessing formal housing in Landfield organised by the Human Settlement Service, the Department of Housing which

took place at the very beginning of my research. It was an event⁶ where ward councillors, ward residents of formal and informal settlements and political activists from Landfield were informed by the provincial government about the new housing projects. Isaak was one of the founders of this social movement in 2001 with the aim to encourage resistance to evictions and the cutting off of basic services to those who cannot pay for them. With the goal of getting a sense of orientation and to map the research field according to the different socio-political milieus of Landfield and Fairlady I asked Isaak to assist me for the two first weeks of research. He introduced me to the housing structures related to income (informal and formal settlements), the hotspots for crime and drugs, the so-called ‘no-go-areas’, gang occupied territories, party political representations of the different wards etc.. For his research assistance I paid him a salary which got me into serious trouble. After the two weeks of our working relationship his wife approached me confidentially saying that Isaak spent his pay by “doing drugs” instead of contributing to the household. Another situation followed where I anticipated a quarrel with his wife about his drug abuse. I signalled to him that although I was not prepared to support his addiction I was still interested in staying in contact with him and in continuing our vibrant discussions on politics. This incident alerted me to the seriousness of drug related problems in everyday life of the township areas which I later on was confronted with many times. During the entire period of my fieldwork I regularly visited Isaak and his family and followed his activities in local politics from leaving his social movement, entering local government as a personal assistant of a mayoral committee member, campaigning as a ward councillor candidate in a bi-election etc.. I got to know Isaak’s mixed reputation within Landfield as different people warned me to be cautious as he was said to apparently misuse international funds dedicated to his social movement to buy drugs for his own use. Furthermore they warned me that his son is a *Fancy Boy* gang member and last but not least his brother is also a criminal in prison for stabbing several people to death etc.. In the course of the research I dealt with many different locally controversial actors from various political parties, NGOs as well as social movements. In these situations it was a challenge to maintain my position as an objective researcher, not taking sides with any political party nor having personal preferences. The strategy I applied to sustain access to local knowledge in this highly messy field was that I continued to perform my research publicly with different locally controversial actors. I was listening to gossip but not sharing it. This attitude resulted in a difficulty in triangulating this kind of data and I often found myself in the situation of waiting for a safe occasion in order to do so. As mentioned above, when

⁶Apart from the reconstruction of life trajectories the applied methodological approach is based on the use of dense instruments such as the event analysis (see Lachenmann 2010: pp. 6, 22-23).

love affairs between public persons, intrigues and all kinds of rumours were shared with me, my method of observation was also applied as a strategy to triangulate gossip since it sharpened my way of looking at specific situations.

The second type characterises a relationship that confronted me with the transgression of moral boundaries challenging my accountability towards my research partner and to political institutions. It doesn't reflect a success story as such but a fruitful experience. As indicated above I accompanied a developmental programme in Fairlady for more than one year which was conceptualised and sponsored by the South African government in corporation with the German Technical Corporation (GTZ). The programme involved local community peace workers, ward councillors and a project co-ordinator and a trainer. It took time until the local staff acknowledged my position as a researcher and not as a development agent of the GTZ. In order to express the independence of my work from the GTZ I mainly spent time and held conversations with the local staff and only met twice with the German management. This was also related to my primary interest in observing how the programme succeeded in practice and how it was politically embedded within the area. According to the flow of information I experienced the project manager Thabo to be co-operative and tried to develop a durable contact. During this period I observed the ups and downs of the project's management until its closure. The intimate details that the local staff informally shared with me sensitised me to the observation of specific dynamics, such as personal relations between project members, clientelism, intrigues and rumours of a lack of accountability that eventually led to a corruption case. In this regard I entered a situation where all stakeholders in the project met to question the financial expenditures declared in the audit. I witnessed how information given on expenditure did not agree with my experience on the ground. Right after the meeting I was asked by the project manager Thabo to accompany him to another township where I furthermore witnessed a money transfer of a large sum with an elderly woman. I hesitated to delve into a conversation with the respective person earlier as well as at following meetings. The dynamics of interaction with this research partner turned bad. The situation of witnessing arose at the moment of a justified suspicion of what I would describe as social practices of corruption (see Gupta 2005: pp.388; Blundo/Oliver de Sardan/Arifari/Alou 2006). The witnessing itself left me in an insecure position as an uncertain confidant. This means that I didn't triangulate the data immediately but waited for a safe occasion to do so. After a few weeks the person in question was discharged from his position because of misuse of project funds and shortly after started to work for the Department of Social Services. Later he, as a former ward committee member, boycotted a focus group discussion that I organised together

with a local NGO and its research team on the ward committee system, an institution that had been introduced by the government in order to enhance decentralisation and participatory governance. In this case the information gathering resulted in a complexly interwoven situation and the research partner terminated our working relationship after his dismissal. Although relevant questions left me curious, and my interest in the specific character of this research partner remained, I accepted his decisions to break up communication.

The third type of research relationship stands for gender activism and solidarity. It refers to a political activist from Landfield's neighbouring township Parrow Park. We both started working at the same time for the NGO *Centre for Global Activism (CGA)* in Cape Town city centre, I as an intern and Lilly as a researcher from the local community. Our team work began with a project on local government and participatory governance financed by the German Rosa Luxemburg Foundation giving me the opportunity to investigate a perspective critical of the state, and to follow translocal networking and knowledge transfer. I became very interested in Lilly's biography and got permission to use her CV as a life trajectory. The relationship opened up further female perspectives and experiences in township life and local politics. Lilly and I became friends and I experienced a long lasting, mutually valued relationship. I supported Lilly's ambition to finish her Bachelor studies in Adult Education. She even came during a trip visiting CGA donors in Belgium to give a presentation at Bielefeld University.

Through this friendship I got to understand that the sense of belonging to a particular place is very different from my ideas of freedom, safety and security. For instance, although Lilly received a regular salary as a researcher and enjoyed full citizenship which would allow her to move freely and leave the dangerous site of township life, she still stays there. A phenomenon which I very often encountered in Landfield and Fairlady as well - that inhabitants with regular income like policemen, project managers etc. choose to stay in the violent prone area with poor housing, poor sanitation etc. although their financial situation could allow a social upgrading. Some of these people were violated in their own township area, being raped, robbed or hijacked, but even this experience did not make them leave their "home"⁷. Since Lilly had always been actively engaged in community based organisations and in local politics within her area she developed a sense of responsibility towards her community. The "perils of belonging" to the respective community and sharing the common apartheid past

⁷ Pfaff-Czarnecka analysed the discourses of home and belonging in a lecture given at the international conference "Ethnicity, Citizenship und Belonging in Lateinamerika" in Bonn (04.-06.10.2010) and thereby stressed that the notion of feeling at home "is nothing fixed", see Pfaff-Czarnecka 2010: pp.6).

bonded Lilly to her particular place (see Geschiere 2009)⁸. Furthermore Lilly's friendship opened up my eyes to the "diverse constellations of belonging" (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2010: pp.5). Lilly articulates her attachment to a particular locality ascribed as a coloured area, where she "feels like being a coloured". At the same time her work as an activist let her acquire a method of belonging to a multi-cultural community where her sense of belonging with coloureds becomes blurred. In this instance activism rejects and overcomes political racism as a principle of categorisation and social organisation (see Wimmer 2008: pp.989). These cross boundary activities are especially prevalent among social movements including some NGOs in order to promote other non-racialised principles such as equality and to undermine the historically rooted legitimacy of racial boundaries.

These working relationships offered me an access to the field sites that revealed the complexity of politics in everyday life. It also sensitised me to the feel of collecting data in a precarious setting confronting limits and discovering structure.

4. Violence in the Field – Confronting Limits and Discovering Structure

The new democratic South Africa is considered to be one of the countries with the highest crime rates in the world. News agencies often distribute reports such as "Every minute at least one woman is raped in South Africa". During the entire research period I collected local newspaper articles on crime in the research areas in order to assess the probability of occurrence and to follow the rhetoric in local discourse, for instance around the contested issue of the death penalty. The everyday observations of the local media coverage not only made me see the uniqueness of South Africa's crime problem as lying in the 'volume of crime' but also in its specific violence, manifested in high levels of interpersonal violence and the way crime is pursued (see also Altbeker 2007). Comaroff & Comaroff (2003: pp. 12) point out that in South Africa the preoccupation with crime has changed into a public mania that makes it difficult to differentiate between the reality and the representation of crime as a phenomenon. While the existence of crime is obvious and indeed the crime rate is high, people tend to overlook the fact that the incidence of crime is spatially highly unequal. It is mostly people in the marginalised townships and former homelands where women in particular suffer from crime and violence. The dimension of gendered violence developed in the post-apartheid era as an initiation ritual among gang members in Cape Town's townships locally known as Cape Flats. Gang members proved their masculinity by raping women and

⁸ Geschiere analyses the perils of belonging as different modes of connection. Thereby he focuses on the idea of autochthony as an "expression of the local – to be born from the soil" – in its very different notions in Africa, notably Cameroon, and Europe, particularly the Netherlands, see Geschiere 2009: pp. 2.

by means of other forms of ritualised violence establishing manhood (Schaefer 2000 (a): pp. 10). Although women in townships are more concerned about the systematic practice of rape as an initiation ritual of male gang members, it seems to be more gender differentiated than colour bonded which can be inferred from media coverage of sexual violence against white women living in the middle income suburbs. The current classification of South Africa as a “rape prone society” in public discourses refers to the inherent gender inequality of structural violence (Schaefer 2000 (b): pp. 131). The popular notion of *Rape Town* often used as synonym for Cape Town by women across all social milieus – also discloses the continuity of associating current South Africa with gender violence.

In fieldwork one prominent topic in everyday talk was related to crime happening in the researched communities and in the broader Cape Town region. This was true when the incident was particularly brutal or local gangs were involved in it. I observed that in all city council meetings, sub-council meetings, conferences on local government, workshops etc. crime was always one of the serious issues of townships that was discussed. Nearly every South African whom I met had a story to tell about a personal experience of crime such as being robbed, mugged, hijacked or worse, or a story about relatives and friends being victimised. I want now to reflect this public anxiety about crime in regard to my research in township communities.

Because a Bielefeld colleague had been robbed at gunpoint during his research in the South African city of Durban before I started fieldwork I considered precautions having to do with safety in finding an appropriate accommodation as well as obtaining prior information about environments. I did this by studying a map of the area and asking questions about its character. Moreover I was establishing contact points which allowed me during fieldwork to maintain communication by keeping persons informed about where I was and with whom I was interacting. These persons were my host families, informants and friends. As I did multi-sited ethnography in the two adjacent townships Landfield and Fairlady, the need to be flexible gave me a reason to rent an old VW beetle (in order to be able to reach the township of Fairlady more easily but also to attend city council meetings in Cape Town centre, workshops and different events in different situated areas etc.). This meant that in the first two weeks of my stay in Landfield I paid particular attention to developing my sense of orientation in order not to get lost. As mentioned above, during the two first weeks I had a local research partner who assisted me in locating the different socio-political milieus.

My fieldwork was also influenced by forces existing within the society such as the mind-set towards women's vulnerability, the existing social structure and norms for controlling violent situations, the present political environment etc. (see Peggy 1970: pp. 4). Driving around in the Cape Flats with my VW beetle was discussed as a dangerous endeavour by most of the people I worked with. My host families were always worried about my safety in particular because as a female they considered me to be more vulnerable. Especially at the beginning of my research I felt that my environment tried to protect me because of "presumed naivety as an innocent abroad" (Peggy 1970: pp. 6). My position as a female researcher was constructed as someone who might get into difficulties from which I would not have the skill, knowledge, or leverage to get out of by myself. Most of the time I did follow the advice of locals about security measures and their demands to be constantly alert. People of both townships, especially at the beginning of my fieldwork, always referred to the murder of an American field researcher who had been taken out of her car and killed in the township areas of Cape Town - "wrong place, wrong time, wrong people" as they used to say. After one year of getting to know my areas I felt secure and lost the sense of caution which people kept on reminding me to have. This actually led me into a violent incident in Fairlady where I, together with two political activists on our way to a focus group discussion, was hijacked by so-called "*tsotsis*" (street gangsters) in the late afternoon. It was an incident where I was directly confronted with racism. I later found out that the *tsotsis* were saying in Xhosa to one of my colleagues from this area that they had seen me going in and out of their section for so long and that they "didn't want whites" in their area. This incident illustrates how my body navigated racialised fields being itself racialised and its implied/unspoken meaning attached to the superiority of whiteness (see Winddance Twine 2000: pp. 17). Thus, the experience of vulnerability exposed me to a situation where inequality of power between me as a white researcher and the *tsotsis* as representatives of the field site implicitly questioned the legitimacy of the research itself (see therefore also Lorenz-Meyer 2004). In the end I could at least prove that the "innocent abroad" was capable of escaping from this violent situation together with my two colleagues. Moreover in the violent situation itself I observed that the other colleague, a so called coloured, carried a gun under his t-shirt which the *tsotsies* took possession of. This colleague identified Fairlady as a black township dominated by the African National Congress, the former liberation movement. After the incident he explained to me that in areas like Fairlady, he didn't feel safe and due to his past as an underground activist he is used to carrying a gun. Afterwards he decided to support the cause for a gun-free South Africa as he had become aware that his gun was now in the wrong hands. The fact that

my colleague carried a gun with him also demonstrates his pre-occupation with fear and the need to secure and protect himself in areas like Fairlady. Furthermore the account illustrates another dimension of classifying areas into safe, less safe and no-go areas which directly relates to racialised identity. His construction of Fairlady is an excellent example for showing how a township materialises as a racialised and party political pole considered as being less safe.

Apart from the anxiety, it turned out that this incident of being hijacked opened doors to further ethnographic opportunities to deepen my knowledge of the meaning of gun possession, how local police and community members react to crime, what help the state provides for “victims” etc. The three counselling sessions that I joined took place in a state institution where trained psychologists try to rehabilitate persons with experiences of victimisation. Both colleagues didn’t want to be counselled but one colleague in particular suffered terribly under this experience as it happened in his own neighbourhood. A few weeks after the incident we re-organised the focus-group discussion, this time not in Fairlady but in Cape Town. It was well attended and all community members felt extremely sorry for what had happened. I was quite aware of the fact that the *tsotsies* had social relations with some focus group members.

After this incident I never felt comfortable again in Fairlady because of having experienced fear. Ironically I was extremely lucky that the hijacking happened after already doing a year of research as it would certainly have negatively affected my self-confidence and ability to collect data. In this respect foreign researchers are sometimes considered to have access more easily to a broad range of information than local researchers do (Lachenmann 1995: pp. 7). It is related to their position within their own society (Diawara 1985: pp. 5, 8-11). This sustains my argument that my position as a foreigner conducting research in violence-prone areas was an advantage because I moved in the field with a certain confidence and artlessness in respect to how easily people are able to cross the moral boundary and exert violence. Local researchers as well reflected on their gender specific risk perception as methodological challenges in doing a survey of service delivery in Fairlady (see Nleya and Thompson 2009). It demonstrates that deliberating on this aspect of the research process is both necessary and helpful, particularly in terms of acknowledging the need to factor fear or uncertainty into the ways in which research unfolds and discloses. It furthermore shows how the research on social and political boundary making, in respect to stereotyping areas based on safety and security criteria, sooner or later revealed reflected compelling realities.

5. Localising the Research

I want to briefly return to its starting point where I introduced the core category of violence in relation to townships, local politics and political ethnicity. It is important to stress that the respective localities and their delineations are not given, but constructed, produced, and maintained through networks of social relations and interactions with working partners, inhabitants, political activists etc. that I sampled, engaged with and analysed during my fieldwork. The multi-faceted nature of how “the local” was constituted in these various processes of interaction revealed the category of violence to be a dominant feature (see Pfaff-Czarnecka 2005: pp. 479) making me thereby understand the social field. The multi-sited ethnography approach is, therefore, particularly suited to analysing processes of negotiation between the different trans-local actors and building empirically grounded sociological theories - i.e. concepts and more general statements about local democratisation in South Africa.

The researcher’s positioning within violent areas was followed by arguing that in the first place my background as a European with relatively no previous experience of violence was an advantage for doing research in dangerous critical areas without being pre-occupied with fear, although women are considered to be especially vulnerable. The deliberating on safety and security measures as well as (mainly) taking local advice for granted, allowed the research during the first year to be conducted along safe lines. I consider my reflection on situations where the unsettling of the self in the research process occurs and the manifestation of threat and danger to be important. It affects how data collection is pursued not only negatively but also how it contributed to gaining insights in the various dimensions of the relevance structuring of political everyday life in South Africa.

I positioned myself as a researcher within the political arena in different ways depending on how I was able to access knowledge through personal contacts with political actors. I highlighted the methodological challenges of establishing longstanding relationships with locally contested political actors and integrating them into the research process as partners. The different ways of building up relationships with research partners show how I organised my access to and how I found my path within the field sites. Furthermore to integrate and work together with locals in the research process led to stimulating discussions and improved my understanding of the ‘others’ (Lachenmann 1995: pp. 7).

In conclusion I return to the issue of positioning myself within the different notions and levels of boundary-making that emerged in all aspects being discussed here. Classifying racism,

coding and making sense of drug abuse and corruption, imputing interests, telling stories of violence and crime, including informal everyday life situations, identifying (oneself and) the other in racialised terms rather than in other terms and so on – these actions were constantly re-drawing the boundaries around possibilities and limits of research situations, i.e. of doing ethnography.

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