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Ulf Engel, Claudia Gebauer, Anna Hüncke (Ed.)

NOTES FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT – RESEARCH PERMITS BETWEEN REQUIREMENTS AND "REALITIES"

DFG

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between Requirements and "Realities"**

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CONTENT

Introduction

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Some doctoral theses are primarily the result of working with some form of texts. These doctoral candidates are expected to spend time in, for instance, specialised archives and libraries or to conduct interviews. In the broad field of African Studies doctoral students mainly working with texts also have to go places: again, to archives and libraries that are often based in former colonial metropolis and most likely also in African countries. Other doctoral theses are primarily the result of participant observation – i.e. leaving the library, the archive and office to go to where the action is in order to observe social practices in vivo. While in anthropology this approach goes by the name of fieldwork or field research since the beginning of the 20th century (before it was more expeditions), it is interesting to note that today even primarily text oriented researchers speak of going to field when they go an archive in the Global South.

In fact the collection of short texts, or vignettes, in this Working Paper of the SPP 1448 is not about the various understandings and practices of "fieldwork",[1] but the intricate process that enables doctoral researchers to conduct "fieldwork" in the first place. The common thread of all five texts is the experience of applying for, and eventually being granted, a research permit that enables one to go to "the field". The idea for this Working Paper was born out of a workshop lunch in Leipzig in early 2015 when a group of junior researchers and the editor shared more or less absurd, funny, troubling yet also serious or otherwise memorable events around their own attempts to get a research permit in an African country.

While the concrete examples all focus on experiences made in a particular African country (i. e. Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda), it should by all means be kept in mind that this is not at all an Africa-typical topic. As any superficial Google or Iixquick research will tell the interested reader, the necessity to apply for and, eventually, be granted a research permit is very common throughout the world. Thus, for instance, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Ecological Services in St. Paul MN (MDNR) calls upon natural scientists to get a research permit before they are allowed to work in conservation areas in this US state; and if the proposed research "involves a state-listed threatened or endangered species, [one] will need a special permit from the Endangered Species Coordinator & Supervisor, Natural Heritage and Nongame Research Program, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources" (MDNR 2015). The reasons why state institutions regulate research in protected natural sites are quite obvious. To give another example: The authority of Parks Victoria in Australia states on its website that it will grant research permits in order to "ensure research on land managed by Parks Victoria is consistent with park management objectives and legislative requirements":

> *Research projects will be supported where they: help to conserve and protect the natural and cultural features and natural processes of parks; add to scientific knowledge; directly*

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1 For cultural and social anthropology see Radcliff-Brown (1910), Malinowski (1929), Evans-Pritchard (1940), Lévi-Strauss (1955); but also Barley (1983) and Lassiter (2008); for sociology see Bourdieu (1960). Today even political scientists refer to "fieldwork" when talking about their research abroad – though the nature of these fields obviously is quite different.

benefit park planning and management; cannot be undertaken outside a park (Parks Victoria 2015).

As in many other countries this absolutely reasonable process is based on a series of gazetted laws.

However, the idea of legitimate government control over certain research domains does not only apply to natural resources. Of course all kind of medical research on human beings or embryonic stem cells etc. is heavily regulated, too. For example, the German Research Foundation (DFG), like many other major sponsors of research, has issued "Supplementary Instructions for Funding Proposals Concerning Research Projects within the Scope of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)" in which applicants are strongly advised which steps to take to prepare their research in signatory countries (DFG 2008).

Furthermore, the situation with regard to the social sciences and humanities is slightly different from the natural and life sciences. Yes, you may need a permit to get access to certain sections of a particular archive or you, of course, need permission to conduct interviews with government officials etc., but in many countries you do not need a general permit to conduct research, let's say in libraries. You may, however, need a research clearance from your home institution, and an invitation plus affiliation to a research institution in the country of research in order to get the research money and the visa in the host country. For instance, this applies when you are a US citizen and want to do research in Germany or vice versa. While in this regard, government practices differ widely, there is a common tendency towards more rigid regulations of access to a field of research broadly based on the assumption that research is not per se a neutral or valuable practice. It is worth reminding here that Germany is famously lax in this regard, while passing an Internal Review Board (IRB) in the USA is no cakewalk. For the Global South, and particularly for Africa, a sensitive postcolonial moment comes in here. African Studies is still dominated in terms of numbers of scholars, resources, and capacities by institutions from the Global North, and African governments are having a hard time to reverse this unhappy constellation. One way of doing this is by encouraging or enforcing cooperation, regulating access to field sites and demanding a feedback from the researcher. The moral obligation of the researcher towards the people she/he studies has become a sensitive issue postcolonial governments want to control in the same manner as Western governments do. The different institutional apparatuses in place to achieve this goal result in a multiplicity of sometimes incoherent and sketchy procedures.

Many African countries insist on issuing research permits for any kind of academic inquiry, though there is huge country-by-country variation, for instance, with regard to the levels of authority one has to approach that may range from state to district-level. In many cases, the process researchers have to go through is described as cumbersome.

In 2012 the US African Studies Association online newsletter conducted a small poll on this topic (ASA 2012), mainly – but not exclusively – covering Southern African countries. The following answers were documented on question 6 which asked:

Do you perceive it to be more difficult to get permission to conduct research on politically or socially sensitive topics than for other topics? Are you aware of scholars who have been denied clearance to conduct research in this country and/or of the reasons why he/she was denied permission?

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Tanzania: I did my research on gender and HIV/AIDS, which is a sensitive topic. I did not have any problems, however, I did tone down the feminist language for the proposal.[2]

South Africa: Not aware of any scholars being denied at all for research. I don't think there's any issue regarding political or social sensitivity and the granting of research permission in South Africa.[3]

Zambia: No, I am not aware of this ever happening. Zambia is very open and you would even be hard pressed to find any documents labeled [sic!] "classified" in the National Archives and there are none to my knowledge in the UNIP [United National Independence Party, UE] or Catholic Mission Archives (the three main repositories for research). If you can prove your affiliations and funding, and you have a bit of patience in the process of obtaining permission, you will be fine.[4]

Rwanda: It is my feeling that the Rwandan government is actively trying to discourage foreign researchers from doing research in the country. Many of my other friends have also had very arduous processes of gaining approval. I haven't heard of anyone yet who has been denied, but that may also be because some people just get fed up and quit. For projects that are considered politically sensitive (like mine), I feel like there is extra scrutiny.[5]

Zimbabwe: Yes. Yes. I have also known people who have been stripped of their clearance and declared persona non grata. This last person was working on farmworkers. Any work related to politics or to the land reform process is suspect and probably very difficult to pursue. Though my research was political, I was affiliated with the Department of Economic History, and I received research clearance to study post-colonial labor history. Again, this is again a function of the time that I was doing fieldwork, but I would advise anyone thinking about research clearance in Zim to be similarly cautious. Framing is crucial.[6]

Malawi: I don't know of anyone who applied through the NHSRC [National Health Science Research Committee, UE] in Malawi that was proposing sensitive work.[7]

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2   This statement is an interesting example of Othering the country's presumably predominantly male authorities. The speaker obviously assumes that a particular (North-American) understanding of feminism in itself constitutes a key problem that could provoke the Tanzanian authorities not to grant a permit.

3   Interestingly, this statement is in conflict with the actual legal situation under the Immigration Act 13 of 2002 and the Immigration Regulations of 2014 whereby one is requested to ask for a permit. URL: www.initiate-immigration.com/research-visas-permits-south-africa> (accessed: 31 July 2015). Under these regulations, academics who want to conduct research in the country have to document that they are employed abroad, bring proof of "financial independence or sufficient sponsorship for the duration of their stay in South Africa", detail "the essence of the research they will be doing in South Africa", and submit "supporting documentation from affiliated organisations in the country".

4   On this particular one see, for instance, URL: <www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/forums/africa/topics/visa-type-required-for-a-research-student> (accessed: 10 October 2015).

5   As for the current regulations see URL: <www.mineduc.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Application_for_Authority_to_conduct_Research_in_Rwanda.pdf> (accessed: 1 October 2015).

6   Again, the regulations from the Research Council of Zimbabwe are as follows: URL: <www.zimembassy.se/research_council.html> (accessed: 1 October 2015).

7   The Malawian government, indeed, only seems to have regulated study permits. See URL: <www.immigration.gov.mw/student-permit.html> (accessed: 1 October 2015).

Obviously, the degree to which African governments are not only trying to guard their sovereignty, but really are enforcing control over academic research (with the intention to allow only certain, but not all inquiries) differs tremendously as it does on other continents. Naturally, this contributes to the experiences narrated in this Working Paper.[8]

The first short text by Claudia Gebauer from the University of Bayreuth gives further insights on the situation in Rwanda that somehow seem to contradict the above mentioned ASA-related experience – at least for a certain point in time. Her research is carried out in the context of the SPP 1448 project "Translations of the Adaptation to Climate Change Paradigm in Eastern Africa". Among others, Claudia Gebauer's vignette is introducing the institution of ethics committee and raises the question of whether there is some good practice to be copied from this experience (cf. Eckl 2008). She is also drawing attention to insecurity over which rules will be applied when she next comes to the country – an issue that elsewhere has been discussed as a constitutive element of neo-patrimonial rule (cf. Erdmann and Engel 2007: 105f.).

The second text is from Katharina Heitz Tokpa who is with the University of Freiburg / Breisgau. She is working in the project "Constraint and Creativity on African State Boundaries". Her work has led her to the Côte d'Ivoire and a place called Ouangolodougou. Enjoying Ivorian citizenship by marriage, Katharina Heitz Tokpa's access to a research permit was rather smooth – however, getting access to "the field" proved more difficult. This vignette introduces complex host-stranger and stranger-guest relationships that have worked their way from serendipity to hospitality to reciprocity.

In her vignette Anna Hüncke from the University of Konstanz is recalling how she finally managed to get a research permit to carry out work on the South African Police Service (SAPS) – a topic that obviously is sensitive. Anna is with the SPP project "The Anthropology of Transnational Crime Control in Africa: The War on Drugs and the Fight against Human Trafficking" and she does her field work in Musina, a town bordering Zimbabwe. Her text introduces notions of time, patience and hierarchy. Again, one is tempted too easily to relate this to Weberian ideas on bureaucracy. But Anna Hüncke's story also is telling with regard to local police suspicion vis-à-vis national headquarters.

The fourth vignette is a co-production by Olivia Klimm from the University of Freiburg / Breisgau and Shahadat Hossain from the Technical University Dortmund. While Olivia Klimm is with the project "Constraint and Creativity on African State Boundaries", Shahadat Hossain is working with the project "Translating urban infrastructure ideals and planning models: adaptation and creativity in water and sanitation systems in African cities." They take this Working Paper as an invitation to critically reflect on the inequality and difference between the researcher "in the field" and the researched "Other" that is "maintained by, the social organization of access to places, infrastructures and other resources along the binary of privilege and deprivation".

Vignette number five comes from Sung-Joon Park, a post-doc originally from the University of Halle, and now a research associate with the Institute of Anthropology at Leipzig University. He has been with the SPP project "Translating Global Health Technologies: Standardisation and organisational learning in health care provision in Uganda and Rwanda". His paper on "IRBs as traveling technologies: Between virtues and regulation" reflects his experience of conducting research in Uganda. According to him, this payments to the Institutional Review Board in a highly bureaucratized and regulated field of research ethics "reflect less the insufficient salaries

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8   By the way, although these examples are drawn from the work of "foreigners" (i.e. non-Africans), this is not to say that African citizens are not encountering similar challenges when they are conducting research in their own or other African countries, too.

of the Ugandan scholars doing the clearance, but more the lack of institutional capacity to set what anthropological research and ethics one wants for Uganda".

In the next vignette, Jannik Schritt from the University of Göttingen is looking at his experience of doing fieldwork in Niger. He is with the comparative SPP project "Oil and Social Change in Niger and Chad". Jannik explains why he had chosen a vague research title because of his own insecurity about doing research on what he considers to be the "secret, non-transparent and corrupt nature of the governance of oil". He also describes how the process of getting a research permit in Niger – pushing formal "paper work", combined with informal "ground work" – actually helped him in the actually performing his research.

Norman Schräpel has also been working in the SPP Project "Translating Global Health Technologies" that is based at the University of Halle. Since March 2015 he is with the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in Bonn. He provides another perspective on conducted research on Rwanda, coming back full circle to the first vignette in this Working Paper. His vignette is entitled "Getting the papers right – Some reflections on the politics of research permits in Rwanda". You may wish to find out whether these two papers describe the same "reality"!

In combination these seven accounts on obtaining a research permit and getting access to the field in different cultural and political African environments provide vital insights into the conditions of conducting social science research in Africa countries. They are by no way meant to exoticize Africa, African countries or people. Rather the opposite: The seven vignettes not only give evidence about how the described processes of trying to get a permit shape the researcher's perception of the research environment and constitute their own identity as researcher, but they also indicate how the object of study is mutually constituted through these processes.

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"Be humble" in Rwanda

Claudia Gebauer

That was the advice a colleague gave me prior to my first encounter with the state department responsible for research permits at the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) in Rwanda. While my first online inquiries on the procedures and necessary documents were successful and caused a whirl of paperwork, the site was not accessible anymore when I tried to submit my collected documents two months prior to my field research. Visiting the site regularly, I was left with one single option: to go ahead and submit my portfolio directly at their offices in Kigali. After I had to resubmit a letter of support that originally had the wrong recipient named in the address field, my enquiry was successful and processed quickly without me needing to explain myself to the ethical committee.

> *Encountering the ethical committee*
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> *All over the world, it is often mandatory for researchers, medical or not, to present their research interest and methodology to an ethical committee for approval. The committee will engages the researchers on questions concerning the anonymity of respondents, the handling and protection of data, etc. In Germany however, such a procedure does not exist for social scientists since it is assumed that the research institution and the grant giving institution have already examined methodology and ethical implications of the research. In Rwanda, some social scientists were, in the past, asked to present their work for approval before a research permit could be granted and the procedure has since been expanded to include all research conducted in the country. Applying for a research permit in 2011/12 however, there were only some social sciences projects that were asked to go through the Rwandan ethical approval and the baseline for whether or not someone would be sent there was not openly shared. The procedure itself consisted of holding a ten-minute presentation in front of the committee and a Q&A-session thereafter. Not having to undergo this procedure at the time of my own application, I was astonished to learn from a colleague that the committee members seemed unaware of the details of the presented project, asking largely unrelated questions. Also, the preparatory documents delivered to them had apparently not been given a second look. While any substantial discussion of the project was thus rendered impossible, the fact that my colleague had been asked to present the research there seemed all the more arbitrary.*

About six weeks after my initial submission I was equipped with a research permit explaining that the government approved my study on Rwandan processes and procedures of adaptation to climate change, while at the same time asking the reader for support of my endeavour. In the following months, during my fieldwork, I carried it with me wherever I went. However, I never had to remove it from my folder in Kigali. Whenever I interviewed representatives of the manifold NGO's, CSO's, development partners, or government institutions engaged in the field, no interview partner ever demanded to see the permit.

In less urbanized areas, attempts to inquire into how Rwandans experienced effects of climate change and the relating development activities put forth by the government and other agents of development were quite different. Having been made aware by previous interview partners and acquaintances that my presence in rural areas might quickly raise questions if it were to be left unexplained, I regularly set out on a "tour de force" through local administration's offices. Thus, outside of Kigali, I often spent about 1.5 days touring the offices of the local government (see figure 1) of each of the administrative realms covering my research area, miniscule though it was. Thus, whenever I wanted to interview members of households from a certain village, I would commence by driving to the respective District offices and introduce myself to either one of the majors or the environmental officer, as well as ask about the location of the Sector office where I would need to go next. Usually I left a copy of my research permit and a short project description with them (both written in English). I usually also took the opportunity to ask for contact details for the person responsible at the next "lower" level of administration so as to announce myself and circumvent the need for being there without actually meeting anyone. Whilst, on some days, this endeavour was a frustrated by the officer in charge being absent, I could also make use of these institutional marathons for my project.

Being interested in the chain of translation of adaptation to climate change between individuals and entities rather than punctual insights, I regularly interviewed the person responsible for environmental issues at the level I presented myself at. This procedure would repeat itself at least four times on the District, Sector, Cell, and Village levels (see figure 1) before I could proceed with interviewing members of individual households.

Local Government
District-Level   (30 *uturere*)   tasks: planning and financial management
Sector-Level   (416 *imirenge*)   tasks: economic development and service delivery
Cell-Level   (2.148 *utugari*)   tasks: mobilize and sensitize the population
Village-Level   (14.837 *imidugudu*)   tasks: local planning and *umuganda*
Household-Level

Illustration: C. Gebauer

Figure 1: Administrative Entities in Rwanda.
Source: Claudia Gebauer

Presenting the research permit

While I had had to present my research permit to each and every administrative entity on the way to the villages, another colleague had a different experience. Focussing on the research at a specific site rather than being mobile and multi-sited, my colleague introduced himself to the administrative offices without the permit and was granted regular visiting rights. Though there was a research permit issued and ready to be fetched, it was never picked it up at MINEDUC. Indeed, I even saw it lying there shortly before leaving the country six months later (when I went to pick up an extension to my own research permit and papers were being searched through to find this). Apparently, my colleague's research permit was never an issue for the interview partners. It made me wonder – had I not been going there for an interview and to introduce myself would anyone ever have asked for mine? As it happened, a conversation of mine was interrupted by the cell executive secretary once. Previously absent from his office when we were there to present our inquiry, he now darted through the door demanding to be informed about what I was

doing there talking to people. Nonethless I and my translator, without whom my research would have gone less smoothly overall, were able quickly to clear the air and continue our work.

While another field research project was coming to an end, I received an email from yet another colleague asking me to provide some information about the procedures in applying for a research permit in Rwanda. While the famed MINEDUC homepage that I had visited almost two and a half years ago had apparently been completely dismantled by then, I simply forwarded everything I had, with lengthy explanations of my own experiences and those of others that I was acquainted with. Our stays in Rwanda overlapped for a few days and I witnessed first-hand another set of experiences of trying to apply for and receive a research permit.

Research permit 2.0

By the time my colleague applied for their research permit, the procedures and concessions had altered significantly from when I had undergone the same process. The forms to be filled in had multiplied considerably and the request for information had become more detailed. While previously the MINEDUC simply asked for a copy of the finalized work to be provided to them, the demands had now changed significantly. Not only was the researcher asked to provide a full list of people to be interviewed, along with their contact details, it was now also mandatory to sign a document where one would agree to provide a copy of all interview recordings and personal notes to the ministry. We were both baffled when going through the paperwork and asked ourselves how to provide names and details beforehand. In qualitative social sciences research it is mostly impossible to know, prior to actually meeting people, who will be willing to share information and be interviewed.

I believe it is not necessary to elaborate here on ethical standards in general, the protection of respondent's anonymity and the (safe) handling of primary data. Whatever good intentions there are for the standardization of application processes, this one went too far in asking for sensitive data. On the one hand, it may not be surprising (see Purdekova 2011, 2013). On the other hand however, it raises concerns when "we" as researchers are asked to "sign over" sensitive and primary data. Speaking in confidence is one of the most important principles we as researchers have to ensure our informants. Informing potential interview partners and respondents about what will happen with their information is common sense, and one can only speculate as to how many would be willing to participate at all or provide honest accounts about their personal opinions and points of view if it was so apparent that there is someone "listening in" (see Begley 2013). However innocent the topic and the questions would be, knowing we would possibly be judged according to our answers later on would most certainly have all of us think twice about whether we engaged in a conversation (see Beswick 2010).

    With the primary data to be provided to the government, the demand of the government to know exactly what is going on seems to be ever increasing. I recently became aware of an instance where an international organization based in Kigali did not grant an interview appointment to an interested researcher prior to presenting an existing research permit. Had someone told me of such an experience two years ago, I would have been astonished. Nowadays I am only slightly surprised, having had ample time to hear of more and more such recollections. How, in future, we will instigate research projects in partnership with institutions based in Rwanda – partnerships that are a prerequisite to the attainment of a permit in the first place – if

no opportunity to exchange is granted without a permit remains to be seen. Whether or not this will contribute to the perception that there are virtually "two Rwandas" we cannot say (see Hintjens 2015; Doevenspeck and Gebauer 2015).

This vignette is not to be understood as simple criticism of the politics surrounding research permits in a country that is in parts still searching for its way to consolidate post-conflict political rules and regulations (as surely research permits initially were not overwhelmingly important). It is also no broad-based plea for ethical committees in German universities – although the importance of reflecting upon the issues of data security, personal rights, and anonymity could gain a more prominent spot in some cases. It is rather to shed light on the multitude of factors influencing individual experiences surrounding the application and, eventually, the granting of a research. While the standardization of the procedure is generally welcomed, the configuration would benefit from some reappraisal.

At the same time I stand to be corrected as my next application for a research permit is still yet to come and I cannot be sure which rules will be in place by then, nor do I know what expenditure to plan for (alas, another issue). That said, we will have to wait and see what experiences others have and whether the demand for sensitive data remains in place. However these questions might be answered, it seems that as Rwanda already features an extremely high number of researchers working in the country and partnering with its institutions, there will be no significant decrease in the research conducted.

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Serendipity, hospitality and reciprocity in Côte d'Ivoire

Katharina Heitz Tokpa

How to obtain a research permit and to get access to the field are frequent topics of conversations during lunch breaks and in more formal settings at any anthropology department. Some of these accounts have gained anecdotic status. Often it is the painfully slow and more arduous experiences – many of which luckily have happy outcomes – that constitute the bulk of these conversations. This should not surprise us, for access to the field and to research participants is fundamental to our research projects. The dependency we might feel as researchers in such situations often contributes to the vigorousness in which some of these experiences are told. I am no exception to that.

What I have to offer is somehow less spectacular arduous. I have Ivoirian citizenship by marriage, so had few bureaucratic hurdles to overcome in order to gain official approval. Neither, initially, was much patience required to build rapport. However, my strategy to secure comparatively smooth access to the field by drawing on previous contacts has its own flip sides. In my particular case, the difficulty was not so much in getting *to* the field, than in managing relationships during and after field research.

In the first part of this vignette, I show what has made my official way to the field relatively smooth. I will then reflect on how I drew on existing and new relationships to build trust in my research setting. This second part of my way to the field was facilitated by local understandings of hospitality and host-stranger relations. As others have described before, we have many roles during research, some of them new to us (Brown 2009). One of these roles was the one of the stranger-guest, which is a social role defined by local culture (Launay 1979). In the third part, I will provide sketchy insights into my continued entanglements with "the field", that is, with people.

As an Ivoirian citizen, I looked for a local institutional anchorage for my research project. Dr. Dabié Nassa, geographer and assistant professor at the Cocody-University in Abidjan was my ideal partner for the project "Constraint and Creativity on African State Boundaries". He has extensively published about the northern border of Côte d'Ivoire (Nassa 2005). After our initial meeting, he went to his superiors to inquire about the next steps I had to take. In order to provide me with an official letter of introduction (*ordre de mission*), a memorandum of understanding was required between his institute, the *Institut de Géographie Tropicale*, and my home institute, the Institute of Cultural and Social Anthropology at Freiburg University. We took a model that they had previously used with researchers from France. The memorandum stated that the two institutes cooperate for this particular research project. It was signed by the respective heads of the institutes in Freiburg and Abidjan. The signed memorandum was presented to the Vice-President of the Cocody-University in Abidjan, who gave us his go ahead. Without further ado, the *Institut de Géographie Tropicale* provided me with an *ordre de mission* that stated the topic of my research and asked those concerned to "receive me well" and to allow me to

"collect information with them".[1] Equipped with an *ordre de mission* issued by an Ivoirian institution, I had gained permission to start my research.

The next step in the process of getting to the field consisted in finding a place to stay. In order to get a holistic view that would allow me to contextualise my research interest on borders in everyday social life, I hoped to find a host family who would be willing to accommodate me in their home and compound. In the following I will describe the way I "found" my hosts by serendipity or happenstance (Hazan and Hertzog 2011).

My husband Gerome was on a business trip in south-eastern Côte d'Ivoire some time in 2013, when an ex-rebel soldier of the new republican army stopped him. The soldier asked my husband to give him a lift to the next town. Not very keen at first, Gerome took him along. In the car, they began talking. In the habit of the *joking relationship*[2], Gerome started "insulting" his passenger: "Aren't you my slave, little Senufo?"[3] The soldier answered that yes indeed, he was from Ouangolo (which is short for Ouangolodougou), a border town in the Senufo-speaking north. Making use of the chance, my husband said that I, his wife, had to go to Ouangolodougou, but that I had no acquaintances there. The young soldier said that his father happened to be the chief of the landowning lineage (*chef de terre)* as well as the chief of the hunter association (*chef des dozos*) in Ouangolodougou and that I could certainly stay with him. On arrival, my husband exchanged phone numbers with the soldier and they kept in touch.

When I was ready to go to Ouangolo, the soldier called his social father, Ouattara Domba, who accepted to receive me.[4] According to Mande culture, his father would be my host (in Jula *jatigi* or *tuteur* in French) in Ouangolodougou. A host in local understanding means someone who provides more than just a place to stay. His role includes taking over responsibilities as a gatekeeper, guarantor and mediator between the visitor and the community. The *tutorat* or host-stranger relationship is an institutionalised relationship with clear role expectations (Launay 1979). This meant that my host introduced me to local authorities and helped me according to his possibilities whenever necessary during my stay in Ouangolo. At the same time, he would vouch for me that I had no intention to harm anyone. If ever I constituted a problem to someone, this person would approach him to solve the problem with me.

First reactions from Ivoirians concerning my research on creativity and constraints on African state boundaries revealed that people assumed I was going to conduct research on smuggling. Realising that, I was afraid I would meet with mistrust upon my arrival. Even if the social father of the ex-rebel soldier was willing to accommodate me, it did not mean he would trust me. Trust and good rapport are indispensable for fieldwork. Kindly, Dr. Kerstin Bauer suggested that her former research assistant, Korotoume Ouattara, could be my companion during my work in northern Côte d'Ivoire. Korotoume Ouattara is originally from the north, but has lived in the south for the past decade. Thanks to her work with Kerstin Bauer, Korotoume has had time to familiarise herself with social science research. As a friend of Kerstin, she

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1   The original in French: "Nous vous serions très reconnaissant du bon accueil et des informations qu'il pourra recueillir auprès de vous." (The source is in possession of the author, dated 28 January 2014.)

2   Joking relationships (here between ethnic groups) allow or even require members of these groups to exchange jokes. Often these jokes challenge social norms, but the joking partner has to play along and cannot "get angry" at his counterpart. Between Dan and Senufo, for instance, a frequent "joke" is to say that the other's group is a "slave" of one's own group (Radcliffe-Brown 1952; Schlee 2001)

3   Senufo is a major ethno-linguistic group in northern Côte d'Ivoire and adjacent regions.

4   "Social" refers to culturally accepted ways of using kinship terms. I emphasise this here, because the soldier and the man he called his father in the speech situation with my husband share neither biological nor legal relations and have only spent a few years together.

trusted that I really was a researcher. Therefore, she was the ideal person to helping me build up trust in the host community.

Together with her two-year-old daughter, we set off by bus to Ouangolodougou, a day-long trip from Abidjan in February 2014. Our host assured us on the phone that he would wait for us at the bus station. However, upon arrival, no one approached us. A group of elderly men were sitting on chairs in a circle, not unlike a small delegation. A younger man went around the bus, obviously in search for someone. As I was the only white person far and wide, Korotoume and I had taken it for granted that our host would recognize us immediately. When we called the number of our host, one of the old men took his phone and answered. We had found our host and *tuteur*. The next moment, our luggage was fixed on motorbikes and we were taken to the compound of the landowner and chief hunter of Ouangolodougou.

It became clear to us that they had not expected a white person. How should they have known? The young soldier had only encountered my husband and not me. Our host family was worried whether they could offer us the comfort a white person in their eyes would need. They asked Korotoume whether the *toubabu muso* (white person in *Jula*) would be able to wash herself with water from the bucket. Would she be able to eat their food? Luckily, Korotoume could quell their worries and soon a room was made ready for us. The first night, we slept in the room of the chief's first wife. One of our hosts' ventilators rendered the heat bearable. The next day, we were given our own room with a mattress on the floor for me and a mat for Korotoume and her little daughter. Korotoume declined my repeated suggestion to share the mattress with me.[5] Over the following days and weeks, Korotoume and I became a team, despite and because of the many asymmetries and mutual dependencies of this relationship. Korotoume strongly identified with our mission to collect data and would inform me unasked about everything that was going on around us.[6] As we made many enquiries together, I will sometimes use the form "we" in the following.

The first morning at our hosts', we introduced ourselves at length, expressed our appreciation for hosting us, and presented our gift, a cloth from my husband's home region, to the chief. Then we explained him the reason for our stay in Ouangolo. Translating the idea of scientific research into the local context was no easy task. When Korotoume explained my project in *Jula*, I often heard the word "enquêti", investigation; she also said that our work was linked to the big school, the university. The younger staff around the chief nodded approvingly and further reassured the chief.[7] Important for building up trust seemed to have been the recitation of people that Korotoume knew in common with the family in Ouangolo. Her father had worked at the *sous-préfecture* in Kong and was known throughout the region.

After this formal introduction of who we are and what we have come for, our host Outtara Domba took us to the *préfet* and then to other authorities of the town: *sous-préfet, maire, chef de village, chef de brigade* of the gendarmerie and police, as well as the *chef de bureau* of the customs' service. To my relief, we were well received by the administrative authorities. However, they had different views on how far they wanted to go in sharing their insights with me, ranging

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5   During our second stay, when we felt that it would no longer be an offense to the hospitality of our host, we decided to buy a mattress for her.

6   When I first arrived in Côte d'Ivoire in 2008 to do research – at the time under rebel rule – I realised that Ivoirians did not move around in town on their own. Usually, they were in twos and more. To go somewhere alone, may raise suspicion. I began enjoying the company of host family members and my research assistant to the point that I feel strange today doing things on my own.

7   Our host, the chief, is generally accompanied by someone – often by his sons or other hunters – due to his status.

from expressing their views on slightly compromising issues without recording to providing written answers to written questions only.

In the first weeks, our host organised a car to show us the vicinity of the border post to Burkina Faso, 40 km away; later he also took me to the Malian border about 80 km away. His sons and the hunters *(dozos)* who came to our host family's house on a daily basis took us everywhere we needed to go to by motorbike.

As a host, Ouattara Domba, rejected any financial compensation that I offered him in return for his hospitality. His wives, who were also very hospitable to us accepted financial gifts, first, from my husband and, later, from myself. The younger generation wished I could bring them along similar cameras and mobile phones to the ones I had. Thus on our second journey, Korotoume and I came with gifts for everyone in the household, as well as two mobile phones and four cameras. The connection we knitted for research had gradually gained depth. By the second year, Korotoume and I had taken over social roles that reflected the intensification of our relationship to the family, as the following examples will illustrate.

Two young women, the chief's daughter and his daughter-in-law, were pregnant. When one of them was unable to give birth naturally, she had to have a Caesarean section, a service that the hospital in Ouangolo did not offer. Korotoume and I hired a car and took her to the next bigger town, where she delivered a healthy baby boy. Sometimes, one of the younger women asks Korotoume for advice in family affairs and twice so far, two sons travelled with us to Abidjan to visit their country's biggest town and to work on my family's yams field.

What I have described, shows how a research contact emerging from serendipity developed into a multifaceted reciprocal relationship imbued with cultural characteristics of hospitality, gift exchange and social kinship. Being introduced by trusted locals has proven a decisive strategy to get access to my field site and to build up trust. The Ouattara family has certainly exceeded my expectations as hosts and I, in return, hope to reciprocate their hospitality and guidance to their satisfaction, too. Having used the host-stranger relationship as an entry point to get access to Ouangolo, it is only fair that we play our part of the relationship as well. This means that we owe our host the gratitude of a *stranger-guest,* which is a locally defined role that surpasses the payment of the rent. What our hosts expect us for their hospitality in the framework of the host-stranger relationship remains to be seen. Perhaps, one day, the chief or his sons will ask us to host one of their children in my husband's house in Abidjan. The management and negotiation of the give-and-take of this relationship has become a crucial element of research life – long after the return from the field.

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"All you need is time": Waiting for a research permit and establishing familiarity in a South African border town

Anna Hüncke

In order to work with the South African police or any other national security agency, I had to be granted a permit and adhere to "the procedures", I learned from a police official of the national research unit in Johannesburg in April 2012. In the course of my application process I became aware that only one part of these procedures was to address the National Commissioner of the South African Police Service (SAPS). Furthermore, I had to hand in the required documents, including letters of support from my university, questionnaires for the interviews, and a statement describing the benefits the research project would have for SAPS. Another part of the procedures was not stipulated in the guidelines but learned through experience: I needed a facilitator, a person within the police who was likely to forward the documents to a police official taking decisions about my request. In my case this was a secretary working in the police headquarters. The contact with her was arranged by a researcher who had worked with the South African police before. Apart from needing the secretary's assistance, I had to "make follow-ups", i. e. to regularly inquire whether or not the documents had made their way down to the next level of the hierarchically organized South African Police. Obviously, the documents gained importance if I inquired by phone or in person at the respective level. Furthermore, I used this possibility to inquire for contacts of the official in charge at the next decision-making level.

Encouraged by the positive response from the national level of police three months after my initial request, I approached the cluster commander of Musina, the highest police official of the border town where I was conducting fieldwork. However, he told me politely but determinedly that he had not received any letter of permission from his provincial head concerning my research with the local police. He suggested that I should ask him again a week later. This scenario continued for nearly three months: I inquired at the police station and was told that no response had been forwarded from the provincial level but that I was welcome to follow up soon. However, one day the commander told me he had received a document granting me permission to conduct interviews. Similarly to when I had received the positive response from the national section of police, I was convinced that my actual work with the police could start. This hope seemed to become reality when the commander's secretary introduced me to most of the high-ranking police officials in Musina. He explained: "She has a permit" and then briefly pointed out a few points about my person before addressing me with "You can go ahead now and start your work".

However, attempting to approach some of these officials, I was put off several times by comments such as "I'm busy. Come back tomorrow!" And trying my luck with a warrant officer, he refused to respond to any queries pointing out that his superior had not instructed him to talk to me.

Upon an encounter with the communication officer of the police in Musina, he explained to me that nobody except him was allowed to talk to me. While this clearly differed from what the

cluster commander and his secretary had stated, I was happy that the communication officer provided me with my first interview and invited me to an awareness raising event against gender-based violence. During this event, the communication officer's adjutant introduced me to some of her colleagues. To my surprise, they neither inquired about an official research permit nor did they bother about their superiors' instruction to talk to me. Instead, they asked about my place of origin, European football teams, and my opinion on South Africa. A month later, when my first fieldtrip ended, I had made contact with several police officers in Musina.

As opposed to the police officers' reservations towards me during my first inquiry for an interview, I was welcomed when I returned to Musina for my second fieldwork some months later: "Oh, you are back. How was Germany? Did you bring me anything?" One of the officers proposed: "Come and visit me in the office." Another said: "Do you want to join our patrol?" Moreover, officers, who already knew me from my first stay, functioned as facilitators by introducing me to their colleagues who, for their part, were ready and open to talk to me. None of the old or new acquaintances demanded to see a research permit, even though I had received a second permit shortly before my flight to South Africa in 2013, after applying for it months in advance.

In the beginning I could not gain access to police officers, neither while I lacked a permit, nor while I had a permit. While the station commander refused to give his go-ahead for interviews as long as my national permit had not been confirmed by the provincial police, other officials refused to talk to me, even after I could present the national, provincial, and local approval, stating that they had other obligations or that they had not received any instructions from their authorizing officer.

Obviously, part of the refusal was that I was perceived as an untrustworthy person. The change to seeing me as an acquaintance might be best summarized in the words of Jack (name changed, A. H.), an official who had – despite his consent to an interview – refused to respond to most of my questions at first. He revealed to me: "That time that I didn't know you, I didn't know why you asked all these questions. I thought you were a spy from the national [office of police]. But now I can talk to you and enjoy time with you." Arguably, Jack had interpreted the research permit as indicator that I was charged with scrutinizing his work for the police headquarters. In this way the permit had even resulted in an impediment for my access to individuals working for the police. However, the research permit usually had little influence on whether officers opened up to me or not, for this predominantly depended on the opportunity to establish a personal contact over time, often facilitated by a colleague I had got to know before.

Police officials' getting to know me meant I needed to spend time with them, and my waiting for the official research permit and my familiarizing with the written and unwritten procedures around a research permit meant I needed to invest time. In fact, committing time was a crucial component for my attempts to establish ties with police from two angles: on the one hand, spending time with police officials and patiently waiting for their response, and, on the other hand, waiting for the issuing of the research permit together with time demanding learning of research permit procedures, both, were part of the unwritten rules for gaining access to the police in South Africa.

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The cake that is (not) shared: On the predicament of inequality in ethnographic research

Olivia Klimm and Shahadat Hossain

A guard has just whistled back a young Senegalese boy who was about to cross the stretch of public shore appropriated and controlled by the Senghor Beach Spa,[1] a private luxury hotel chosen for a conference we are attending. Intrigued by this incident we approach the man to learn more and soon understand that Omar (name changed), unarmed and dressed like all colleagues of his *brigade* in *tirailleur*-style uniform, primarily serves as an accessory to ambience. Avid for any opportunity to de-sterilize our air-conditioned perception of the place, we come back for more conversation the following evenings. "Moi aussi, j'en ai besoin pour garder des choses", Omar consents, he needs it, too, to keep something, to care for something. In a couple of days we will know what it is, what kind of resource we are to each other.

Unsure about the gesture we hesitate to offer a piece of cake from the lavish buffet reserved exclusively for the hotel guests to bolster the twelve-hour night shift of our interlocutor. But it is well-received. Separate catering of plain meals for staff is deducted from wage, a wage from a no-contract job that does not feed the family at home either. We are sitting at Omar's outpost with a view overlooking a combed beach and a darkening tranquil sea. Whitney Houston's "I will always love you" resounding from the *soirée* in the background takes it over from a keyboard version of "Yesterday" to disarticulate the narration as we delve into Omar's past. Loss, tribulation, adversity are spelt differently here, and in his mined home region of Casamance. It is a past he cannot go back to but which inhabits him; it is a present he cannot go away from but which eludes him; it is a future which is certainly going to be uncertain. "Tout ça là, ça fait mal, très, très mal", it hurts a lot.

The life of middle class is based on certainties, Ntone Edjabe, editor of the Panafricanist magazine *Chimurenga*, has recently pointed out to a German newspaper (Neshitov 2015: n. p.). Perhaps conversing with people coming from that certain world is almost like being there. A moment of *destin,* of rare destiny, the beach guard colleagues and the *chef de poste* do not seem to approve of. Omar's good fortune, as he sees it, gets increasingly disturbed by peeking inquiries and radio orders. Disguised envy, he asserts. We offer to leave, for the risk of rebuke and unpaid suspension is real. "Y'a pas de problème", Omar braves it saying "no problem" with a flicker of disquiet in his face. It all depends on whether the hotel guests really wanted him, the decoration, to speak, to interact, to be a person. The customer is king and the European a demigod, "l'Européen, c'est d'abord un demi-dieu".

We begin to get the measure of the ambivalence of our initial approach, of Omar's signifying of our open, apparently unusual friendliness, of the unviable expectations rising. The music is off now, only the crabs dance to the ocean's murmur at our feet. The cheerful derision has

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1   Some names have been changed.

given way to an intractable truth: "Quand on est avec vous, on arrive vite à pouvoir être un tout petit quelque chose, peut-être", being with us may quickly endow him with a proper, valid existence of his own. The white woman researcher is given preference over her not-so-white male colleague, though identified as a "brother" expected to offer assistance on the grounds of the shared religion of Islam, to take up the task and soothe the pain of being not-so-human. The reified black heterosexual man wishes to reach commensurateness with himself and so desires the white woman, reifying her along the way:

> *De la partie la plus noire de mon âme, à travers la zone hachurée me monte ce désir d'être tout à coup* blanc. *Je ne veux pas être reconnu comme* Noir, *mais comme* Blanc. *Or (…) qui peut le faire, sinon la Blanche? En m'aimant, elle me prouve que je suis digne d'un amour blanc. On m'aime comme un Blanc. Je suis un Blanc. Son amour m'ouvre l'illustre couloir qui mène à la prégnance totale … J'épouse la culture blanche, la beauté blanche, la blancheur blanche. Dans ses seins blancs que mes mains ubiquitaires caressent, c'est la civilisation et la dignité blanches que je fais miennes (Fanon 2011: 111).*[1]

A wooden sculpture of a kneeling and kissing white woman embraced and penetrated by a black man – Omar's goodbye gift, probably bought from a local shop and reminiscent of an unshakeably hopeful fantasy, testifies, not least, to the continuous violent harassment of inequality. He fearfully begs us not to pull out without changing his life, "ne me jetez pas comme ça, je vous en prie. … J'ai très peur". Cruelty is imminent, tears are running already. Bitter disappointment strikes and buries the encounter with that ultimate demand for money: We absolve ourselves with €50! And leave, shaken, him crushed.

The predicament of inequality, as experienced during our stay at the Senghor Beach Spa, is a pointed yet typical example of the im/possibilities of doing social science research based on fieldwork encounters between African black persons living in impoverished contexts and non-black scientists hailing from wealthier parts of the world. Success in the deferential acknowledgement of postcolonial sovereignty stated by the acts of seeking and receiving official research permits – a visa may suffice – is but one variant of becoming able (or not) to engage in fieldwork and not the full story of the on-going struggle towards overcoming the colonialities attached to reaching out to each other in situ and, ultimately, towards producing inclusive knowledge and conclusive arguments. It can be a decisive obstacle to be institutionally hindered from collecting data through observation and conversation; it is no less a crucial challenge, though, to be mentally barred from gathering insights through shared understandings. Much of ethnographic research in Africa, regardless of academic discipline, relies on planned, anticipated or serendipitous encounters and in any case on building personal relationships, rapport, to some extent. Depending on topic, these may lie beyond the realm of postcolonial state permission but well within the predicament of inequality.

This inequality subsists on a perception of difference as uneven worth of the Self and the Other which both informs, and is maintained by, the social organization of access to places,

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1 "Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly white. I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white. Now … who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization. … I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine" (Fanon 1986: 45).

infrastructures and other resources along the binary of privilege and deprivation. Most of the time, first encounters during fieldwork take place within this default asymmetry, with privilege residing with the white or non-black researcher from abroad and deprivation sticking to the black or "People-of-Colour" local informant (or "research participant"). Perhaps this is even more so in the context of African societies grappling with decades of raison-d'état racism on top of centuries of brutalized colonial interaction. More often than not, also the following repeated encounters and resultant relationships remain uneasy as the negotiation of difference revolves around historically entrenched positionalities. This given supremacist ranking of the Self and the Other can even become more acutely, painfully, felt as the encounter grows into a regular exchange.

Even if the material disparity has been made less disruptive by the researcher and is generously ignored by the informant, even if consented common activity, according to some methodological precepts, has been established, and if initial small talk over time has ushered in big talk capable of pushing, in a mutual effort and magical moment, the Self and the Other towards new imaginative horizons of position and representation: difference as inequality, materially and regarding (self-)esteem, still remains a pernicious fact. The immalleable asymmetry of needs and their urgencies bring about discrepancies in the meanings attributed to the encounter, in the resource and importance it may come to represent respectively, and consumes a lot of energy subsequently spent on negotiating some kind of terms of exchange. The encounter then rapidly is reduced, by both sides, to an expedient function of set expectations. This leads to a flawed understanding of each other and, not least scientifically, probably to no valid knowledge at all. The possibilities of really getting in touch with each other, with the ways of being and doing in multifaceted life worlds, with the variable but face-value differences, are fragile and precious.

As a non-black researcher coming from a white wealthy *Elsewhere* you may trigger, fuel and belie expectations and a whole range of emotions at the same time, in spite or precisely because of all best intentions. It may happen that you are friendly and respectful only to inflict on your "research participants" and yourself an extra loop of illusion before together being thrown back to the uneasy starting positions of privilege and deprivation, before reluctantly resorting to resolute rejection on the one side and being hurtfully relegated to your defeated aspirations on the other. However, not resuming hope and action and taking a chance on the occasional white researcher, amongst others, is not an option. And being closed off and inattentive is not an option either for the reasonably sensitive scientific fieldworker, both mindful of the ignominious role academia has had in colonial or imperial projects of subjugation and exploitation and depending, for the sake of your own existence, on people interacting with you. Not approaching and getting to know each other simply is not an alternative, except we aim to deny human nature sociability, curiosity and mobility.

That denial, however, the condition of being physically and mentally sealed off from one another while depending on each other in a lopsided way, is a constitutive element of State and international politics (cf. Rosière and Jones 2012). Going to meet, know and work with each other, or exchange in any other way, respectfully is, for the majority of humankind, a troublesome, dangerous, often even lethal venture. For the circumspect ethnographic researcher it means to try and do without position as privilege and deprivation. "You are a researcher, not a tourist. Don't act like a tourist". Keguro Macharia's (2015: n. p.) prescription for scientific visitors from a white wealthy *Elsewhere* to African contexts may be applied to the places you go to and stay at, the infrastructures you make use of and also to how you engage in relationships "in the field". Yet the opportunistic on-off of the researcher's friendly interest, the dropping in and out of those relational engagements, their dumping on the roadside of the

research journey or their forgetful dispatch at a distance, are not necessarily proof of disdain or indifference, of a cosy retreat into the luxury of ignorance and arrogance. It may just as well express a paradoxical powerlessness in coping with privilege and in standing the burdensome clash of worlds that is an ugly by-product of each encounter. The concomitant failures cannot solely be attributed to individual behaviour falling short of academic or other codes of conduct when stuck in dilemmas inaccurately labelled "ethical". Trying to do without the predicament of inequality rather is a collective, political endeavour and may be tackled by addressing the questions sketched out above: How does inequality shape encounters in the field? How does inequality interfere with or impede research? How to deal with this? Sharing the answers and the scientific as well as personal perils in the process might eventually open up lasting spaces of free encounter and knowledge by and for all.

Omar has now quit his beach guard job and works as a day labourer on construction sites commissioned by Senegalese expatriates sending remittances. This does not make for a living either. Our problematic money transfers provide additional assistance. The warning not to head, like many of his countrymen (cf. Mathieu 2015: n. p.), to the Libyan shores is taken into account. A visa may be a research permit or a permission for Omar to go and see by himself the full scale of his deprivation.

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IRBs as traveling technologies: between regulation and virtues

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You need to have a research permit, as Ugandan colleagues told me, even if one is rarely asked to produce it in the field. A research permit is issued by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). To obtain this permission, my research proposal to study "global health infrastructures and the institutionalization of antiretroviral therapy in Uganda" had to be reviewed by an independent Institutional Review Board (IRB). The final permission came with a letter of the Office of the Prime Minister. I remember that the involvement of the Prime Minister's Office made me feel uncomfortable about a possible political oversight of research. But this letter is – at least in current practice – just a formality and usually research permissions are signed off after the UNCST and the IRB have accepted the research proposal.

What struck me most was that Makerere University asked for a fee of $ 1.700 if I wanted to take my application through its IRB. It was a full package that Makerere University offered for this amount: $ 300 for the UNCST and $ 600 for the IRB. An astonishing "balance" of $ 820 was meant for the staff of Makerere University to "cater for transport, telecommunication, photocopies and printing and *personnel time* [my emphasis] in order to effect the committees to deliver the National Research Permit [to me] in time" as the administrative person wrote me.

The $ 820 was the price to get a timely approval and presumably relieving me from "chasing" my application. Furthermore it involved an institutional affiliation. I found out later, in conversation with other PhD students, that the "rates" differ significantly between Ugandan universities without having a notable effect on the process. I never heard of any application on whatever research topic being turned down, as long as the formal requirements of the UNCST were met. The "personnel time" covered by $ 820 were basically a sitting allowance for the review committee members, which is quite normal in Uganda and other African countries, as I quickly learned too. Also the total sum was not fixed and I was able to negotiate a reduction. Still, even the last price of $ 1,300 raises the question what is a reasonable price for a research permit and more generally if one should pay for research clearance at all.

Rules and virtues

In anthropological debates, the relationship between payments and research in African contexts is subject to controversial stories, like the more general relationship between research and ethics. In the case of IRBs, anthropologists have been skeptical about the desire to regulate social scientific research by an overly formalized ethics apparatus, which mainly underwrites a notion of science that considers controlled hypothesis testing to be the only proper way of doing research.

Payment for research permits is only one example of the many problematic effects of such a regulatory apparatus. Building the critique of these regulations on these subversive effects, however, runs risks of limiting the discussion to a narrow notion of research ethics. Instead I want to maintain that a broader debate about ethics should be utilized in discussing ethical

clearances, IRBs and research permits. In regards to the limited space here, I suggest considering Wenzel Geissler's efforts to make a point about payments as a central yet underestimated ethical problem in medical research in Africa (Molyneux and Geissler 2008; Geissler 2011). In brief, his argument builds on the general intuition that something is wrong about making profit out of ethical research clearances because it signals a financial interest, which could undermine the demand for the impartiality of IRB and its procedures, and in the end of the kind of science it allows to happen. While the rules of impartiality are everywhere an ideal, in African countries payments made in the course of research serve a quite mundane purpose, namely to top up the meager salaries of researchers, health workers and other public servants. This observation directs the critique of IRBs toward an analysis of material inequalities between African and European research institutions, which, as Geissler proclaims, are overlooked and need to be reflected upon.

Albeit this argument about material inequalities seems to be compelling, it is hardly surprising in view of the broader history of development aid in Africa nor does it provide an alternative view of the relationship between payments and research ethics. There is no doubt that university salaries are too small to make ends meet in a city like Kampala, which is getting more and more expensive. From this point of view, paying a sitting allowance for assessing a research proposal submitted by international PhD researchers may appear awkward but comprehensible. Yet, this emphasis on material inequalities reduces payment for research permits to a struggle between "poor African scholars" and the well-resourced extractive sciences of global health steered from the Global North. However, it ignores essentially how actors insert agency in the struggle over knowledge.[1]

To return to my own experience with the IRB, going through the process was an introduction to the rules of scientific conduct at Makerere University, which aspires to apply international standards of good scientific practice. The large number of research projects conducted in Uganda require a standardization of application procedures. Still, taking an application through this standardized procedures requires time and in some cases intellectual support for a proposal to pass the review process. Furthermore, if the review committee would do its job rigidly, perhaps my research proposal and many other anthropological PhD proposals were rejected outright. In my case I had a friendly conversation with one of the review board members, an anthropologist, taking keen interest in my study and providing me with valuable insights, while sharpening my research question in terms of formal qualitative research. With regard to the numerous PhD projects conducted in Uganda, this surely amounts to a considerable amount of work and time, which no lecturer at Makerere University can afford to take serious unless a financial compensation is offered. Therefore discussion about payment should not be reduced to "poor African scholars", but consider how overworked African scholars try to support international research in Uganda under less than optimal working conditions provided by their universities and still maintain a certain level of good scientific practices.

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1   Walter Benjamin provides an intriguing discussion of the critique of material inequalities in his seminal work on "The concept of history". The fourth thesis introduced by quoting Hegel's phrase to "secure at first food and clothing, and the kingdom of God will come to you of itself". According to the fourth thesis we may consider a critique of material inequalities in the case of payments for research permit as a „struggle for the rough and material things", which comes before the pursuit of abstract knowledge. The other part of any struggle, ignored by the historical materialist point of view, however, is the "spiritual", which presents itself as „confidence, courage, humor, cunning, fortitude", as Benjamin emphasizes (Benjamin 2007: 130). For Benjamin the "spiritual" has a "retroactive force and will constantly call in question every victory, past and present, of the rulers" (ibid.). Payments for research ethics are in this regard not well understood if they are only counted as a material gain or material loss in the struggle of knowledge but instead ask for an understanding how actors insert agency into the struggle over knowledge.

More generally, I suggest approaching research clearance from a pragmatist perspective interested in actors' improvisations of best practice in situations of radical uncertainty. What is important about this pragmatist approach is its affinity to an ethics of virtue discussed in philosophy (see MacIntyre 2007; Nussbaum 2001). The way I understand the concept of virtue ethics is that it challenges a deontological notion of ethics, which conceives actions as a rule-following. IRBs and many other technologies to regulate markets, science, and the state build on a deontological ethics specifying a set of rules and principles to assess the morality of behaviour of organizations and individuals. By contrast, virtues are much more difficult to formalize and codify. Virtue ethics is derived from practical wisdom learned in situations where one is struck down by a moral dilemma, which exposes the vulnerability of everyday life (Nussbaum 2001). These dilemmas cannot be resolved by following this or that rule. The specific circumstances ask for confidence, courage, humor or cunning. Along this line of reasoning my research has been interested in the improvisations of therapy through which actors address the problem of hope in mass HIV treatment programs when life-saving drugs are short in supply. This hope in medicine can be understood as an ethics of "keep going" suggested by Alain Badiou which captures how actors take decisions in situations without knowing with any certainty what is in deontological terms right or wrong (Park 2015).

IRBs as traveling technologies

Another but closely related approach to the controversial relationship between ethical clearance and research is to follow IRBs as a traveling technology, as proposed in the SPP 1448 project "Translating Global Health Technologies". Exploring IRBs as traveling technologies extends the comparative analysis of the use of technologies. Instead of considering IRBs as a regulatory framework and compare how this framework is implemented and adhered to in different settings, following the travel of technologies illuminates what is left out and what is newly inserted when a globally circulating technology is adapted into a particular context.

The whole procedure of applying for a research permission took me about three months. Back then, waiting three months or even longer meant a significant delay for conducting field-work. However, this waiting time would hardly surprise a PhD student from the United States or the United Kingdom, where IRBs are an absolutely essential requirement for doing field research. Compared to Uganda, the IRB in the United States and the United Kingdom are even more bureaucratic, effectively "killing" ethnographic field research, as colleagues complain. Those colleagues are either used to these structures or have learned to improvise in order to be able to still conduct field research (Lederman 2006; Simpson 2011). From this perspective, the common practice in German anthropology to sign the research funding approval and thereby commit to follow good scientific practice as defined by the German Research Foundation and finally go to the field as it pleases the research interest appears as a remarkably out-dated practice. Additionally to the guidelines for good practice the German Research Foundation DFG provides a disclaimer in its approval letter stating that "it will not be liable for the risks of field trips".[2] But this may change in the nearby future. The bureaucracy evolving around IRBs in Uganda and the United States is dwarfed by the regulation of research ethics in projects funded by the European Union (EU), which usually involve several countries and requires a harmoniza-

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2   „Für Auslandsreisen sind die Sicherheitshinweise und Reisewarnungen des Auswärtigen Amtes zu berücksichtigen. Für Risiken, die sich aus einem Auslandsaufenthalt ergeben, kann die DFG keine Verantwortung übernehmen."

tion of the national guidelines. Projects may spend half a year for establishing an own ethical review process. In addition this ethical review process is reviewed by an institutionalized ethics committee at EU level. From a governance perspective, the lack of IRBs at German academic institution is clearly a problem. Thus it may not be surprising that the German Research Foundation recently held a workshop on "Research ethics in the social sciences" to raise awareness about this gap in the German social sciences. It is a hint frequently endorsed by anthropologists to develop an own ethics system before it is enforced from above (Fassin 2006). The idea of a virtue ethics may be helpful to capture the situatedness of ethnographic research as I suggested above. Yet to what extent this can be formalized and institutionalized to develop a standard for best practice in managing data is certainly a difficult but perhaps worthwhile question.

The bureaucracy, at times perceived as an obstacle to research, which is a truly global phenomenon, is not necessarily something meant to hinder anthropological research. Yet, a comparison of the adaptation of research permits in the form of IRBs in Uganda, the EU or in Germany reveals that IRBs in Uganda are not backed by national or regional funding strategies. The national budget for scientific research in Uganda is remarkably small so that IRBs in fact are largely a service to externally funded research projects and the mostly young scholars doing the work. In this view, payments for IRBs in a highly bureaucratized and regulated field of research ethics reflect less the insufficient salaries of the Ugandan scholars doing the clearance, but more the lack of institutional capacity to set what anthropological research and ethics one wants for Uganda.

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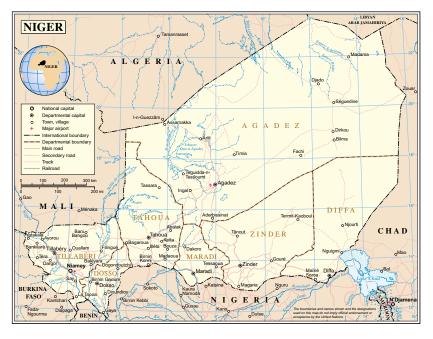
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Doing fieldwork on oil in Niger

Jannik Schritt

In this vignette I describe the process of how to get a research permit in Niger and reflect on how the experience of doing so helped me in the actual performance of my research.

The application for a research permit in Niger has to be filed at the Ministry of Education, *le Ministère des Enseignements Secondaire, Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique* (MESS / RS) in Niamey. As specified in ordinance No. 0113 of 24 June 2010, the applicants have to compile a dossier two months before the intended start of their research.[1] The application form should state the national institution the researcher is affiliated with. Being our research partner in Niger, the *Laboratoire d'Études et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Locale* (LASDEL) in Niamey took care of me and also helped me with the compilation of the dossier. I filed an application with a rather broad research topic about the economy and society of Sahelien countries, especially Eastern Niger (Diffa Region), and decided not to mention "oil" in the title of my application. I chose this vague research title because of my personal insecurity about dealing with Nigerien state institutions and my presumptions concerning the secret, non-transparent and corrupt nature of the governance of oil, informed by the infamous claims of such concepts as the "resource curse". I completed the application eight days after my arrival in March 2011. As I suspected that the decision concerning my application for a research permit could take several months, I asked LASDEL for a mission order for my field trip to Diffa in the East of Niger, and started my journey thereafter.

Map 1:
Map of Niger.

Source:
based on UN map of Niger, found at www.un.org/Depts/ Cartographic/map/ profile/niger.pdf

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1   The dossier needs to contain a description of the research project, a CV, a letter of recommendation, a certificate of enrolment, a copy of the student's ID, a finance statement, a proof of accommodation for the envisaged research period, two passport pictures, a copy of the passport, a receipt of the visa application and a signed commitment to provide the ministry with all necessary information as well as all audio and visual research material.

After about one month of exploratory fieldwork in Zinder, Niger's former capital situated in the South-East and the site of the oil refinery, I continued with my friend and research assistant to Diffa, the region of oil exploitation. On the third day of my stay in Diffa I decided to present myself to the governor of the region with the mission order of LASDEL, as it is advised by any textbook to respect the local authorities. From the very beginning, I perceived my reception as unfriendly or even hostile. It seemed that the governor was already aware of my presence. When I presented my mission order, he questioned the legitimacy of LASDEL, as a private research institute, to authorize my travels and inquiries, and insisted I obtain an official research permit from a state institution prior to engaging in any further research. Additionally, he suspected that my research about resource management and social change in Diffa, entitled in the mission order as "*gestion de ressources naturelles et changement social à Diffa*", was indeed designed to hide my interest in Niger's oil. Reading the title of my mission order he commented that management of natural resources in Diffa could only imply oil ("*resources naturelles? c'est le pétrole ici!*"). When turning me away, the governor claimed that I would equally not be allowed to interview people without an official permit in Germany. Thus, for the governor I was violating formal procedures and he insisted on me following the correct ones.

In contrast, my friend tried to support me, presenting himself as my spokesman. Sitting in front of the governor, he referred to his background as a member of a well-respected family in Diffa, of which some other members were high-ranking Nigerien politicians, diplomats and army officers. By doing so, he was trying to help me by mobilizing informal family and social networks, hoping to convince the governor not to base his decision on formal procedures – that is to say my missing research permit – but on informal loyalties. Jan Beek and Mirco Göpfert (2011) call this oscillation between formal and informal practices of negotiating research access "ground work" and "paper work". "Ground work" describes the mobilization of social contacts and informal channels and "paper work" the documenting and formal processing of applications. They show that for accessing the field, the technical bureaucratic "paper work" and informal practices of "ground work" need to go hand in hand. However, in this case the "ground work" failed. The presence of my friend at the governor's office was questioned and the governor made use of means of intimidation, telling me that he will call the Nigerien president; the state ministries, the university, and LASDEL. He then instructed us to wait in front of his office.

I do not know whether the governor called all the representatives he threatened to inform, but he did call LASDEL, whose scientific director declared that I had been "in a hurry" to do field research, so they had provided me with the mission order. The governor also called the chief of police, who took me for police questioning, taking my passport data and asking me about where I had been and who I had talked to. I stated that I had only visited the family of my friend, but had not yet started to do research. The chief of police then took us back to the governor to discuss further proceedings. After their conversation, the chief of police informed me and my research assistant that I had to return immediately to the country's capital Niamey. To make sure we would really leave Diffa, I had to present the purchased bus ticket for a bus leaving the next morning to the chief of police. When my friend asked whether I was permanently expelled from Diffa region, the chief of police denied this and said that I would be welcome back once I had acquired my official research permit.

This ethnographic vignette points to more than the importance of "ground work" and "paper work" in gaining access to the field. Beyond simply delaying my fieldwork, my experiences and the obstacles I encountered during this episode helped me to better understand my research context. The encounter with the governor gave me preliminary hints about the nature of Nigerien politics as well as the history of oil in Niger in general and the political situation in Diffa in

particular. It struck me that the governor equated natural resources in Diffa with oil, while the management of natural resources like pasture, timber and water is still of great interest to the local population and has been the subject of research before. And why did he take such a tough stance against me as a Western researcher?

I came to understand that Niger had undergone 50 years of mainly unsuccessful oil exploration dominated by Western oil companies before the Nigerien government, under former president Mamadou Tandja (in office from 1999 to 2010), signed a production sharing agreement with China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) in 2008. Tandja used the coming of oil in Niger as a political resource to legitimize his political project "Tazartché" (Hausa for "Continuation"), which aimed to change the constitution so that he could remain in power for another term (Schritt 2014). Within the public campaign to change the constitution, he was presented as the father of oil production; his "pragmatism" and "nationalism" had allowed Niger to become an oil producing country. Furthermore, this "pragmatism" was said to match perfectly with China's reputation for straightforward business practice and "non-interference". When the Western international community enacted sanctions against his regime in response to the "Tazartché" project, Tandja blamed "the West" and its meddling in Nigerien domestic politics for Niger's "underdevelopment" and late entry into oil exploitation.

By turning to China, he portrayed himself as a strong leader able to resist Western neo-colonial interference. In a speech held in Diffa, he publicly demanded that the population of Diffa distinguish between "Chinese" and "Westerners" and immediately make every Westerner who approached the oil production sites known to Nigerien authorities. By associating China's oil diplomacy with his own political project "Tazartché", he helped the Chinese to consolidate their own soft power in Niger in a way the Western powers, with their freedom discourses, had never been able to (Schritt 2013). Tandja's anti-West reaction furthermore attested to the legacy of the colonial history of *Françafrique.* Much of the public apparently shares these sentiments, demonstrated by frequent protest against the perceived neocolonial exploitation of uranium by French nuclear group AREVA in northern Niger. Many Nigerians see it incongruous that, although Niger has been producing uranium since 1968, and is currently the world's fourth-largest producer, the country is frequently ranked last in the Human Development Index. They lay the blame for this at the door of the former colonial power. General anti-West sentiment has spilled over more recently into "protests against Charlie Hebdo" (Schritt 2015). It's therefore clear that contemporary Nigerien politics can only be understood in the light of Niger's colonial and post-colonial history of resource exploitation.

Back in Niamey, I thought that I would never get my research permit after what had happened in Diffa, but it seemed that the governor had not called the Ministry of Education, and I received the official permit two weeks later against a formal payment of FCFA 100,000 (€ 152.45). However, the research permit was not an automatic door-opener. Sometimes I was granted an interview without even being asked to present the permit and sometimes it was sufficient to show the permit. But most of the time that I knocked at office doors, I was denied an interview without the consent of a higher level official, irrespective of my permit. Once this procedure of seeking consent started, I was always transferred to the next level of hierarchy until I was demanded to file a formal written request to the responsible minister (e. g. the minister of finance, interior, petroleum etc.).Though I wrote many such a formal request, I would wait for answers in vain.

This did not change when I decided to apply for a new research permit stating that my work focused specifically on oil. Although I was granted an official permit for research on the socio-economic impact of oil exploitation in Niger just 14 days after application – despite my earlier

presumptions about the corrupt nature of Nigerien oil governance – my hopes of obtaining better access to state institutions and oil companies with such a permit were dashed. The procedure of gaining access to the field remained as challenging as before. I was time and again directed to file a formal written request to the respective minister. This acted as a reminder that formal "paper work" has to be accompanied by informal "ground work" in order to help the formal request succeed (Beek and Göpfert 2011). However, as I made several requests, I did not have time for several parallel time-intensive "ground works". Therefore, I can finally state that an official research permit is not necessarily a "door-opener" to state institutions or oil companies. But the application process on its own is nonetheless worth pursuing because one might learn not only about formal and informal (bureaucratic) logics, but also reconsider presumptions and gain deeper insight into one's particular research context.

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Getting the papers right – Some reflections on the politics of research permits in Rwanda

Norman Schräpel

Starting the paper trail

A colleague reminded me before I left for fieldwork in Rwanda that the first days in the field are unlike any others and that I therefore should be carefully using this intense period of my data collection. And indeed my attention was at a peak, caught up in all around me. The way it smelt when I left the plane at Kigali airport, the feeling I had when the warm sunbeams touched my skin, the shy looks of the people I observed on the streets, or the impressive ways of ordering the hustling crowds at bus stations. I had read about fieldwork experiences in Rwanda. They differed wildly, from some horrible reports, often of experiences with government institutions, to others, which praised the transparency and orderly practices in Rwandan society, sometimes referred to as "un-African". To be honest, at this point I did not think much about getting a research permit. Having research proposals cleared by university committees is not particularly institutionalized in German academic culture, and during my previous fieldwork in South Africa it was not an issue at all. Hence, I only started to think about a research permit when it became a matter of access to my new field sites and a matter of staying in the country. This is when my paper trail started.

In late 2011 the Rwandan government had just changed its procedures for applying for research permits. Since these procedures were not very stabilized, the details I found online or the recommendations I got from others were contradictory. To begin with, there are two institutions in charge. The Ministry of Education has the mandate to register new research projects and to issue the permits, while the National Ethics Committee at the Ministry of Health clears the research design. I started my journey with the National Ethics Committee, since I heard this was the hardest part of the process. And indeed the application was not trivial. First, I needed a large bulk of papers: a full research proposal, a detailed overview of my budget, a letter by a local research partner, a complete CV, observation and interview guidelines, the payment of a € 100 administration fee, and a cover letter.

By the time I had gathered all these documents, I was being put under pressure. To my surprise a number of informants (in particular from local and national governments) started asking whether the Ministry knew about my research. Not enough, I needed an official reason why I was in the country in order to apply for a residency. For the first time in my academic career, I really needed to get a research permit. Long story short, I got it. After about two months, a number of updates for the documents, a presentation of my research and endless phone calls, I received a colour printed letter with the prominent emblem of the Rwandan government that stated that I was entitled to conduct my research. In my field notes I reported about this happy news as follows:

Field note 6 October 2011[1]

> *Finally! I have my ethical clearance. It wasn't as difficult as I had thought it would be. At first I was angry about this 'paper war' and the money I have to spend. It was all quite a bureaucratic, getting the countless documents together. But compared to the horror stories I've heard, it was rather smooth sailing. [...] There might be something, as R. reminded me, in me having ICT [information and communication technologies] in the title. Not only have I jumped on the government's Vision 2020 bandwagon, but ICT also seems to appear much less threatening to them than many other social science research conducted in Rwanda. But why worry, I have it now. Next step, research permit!*

My own somewhat smooth experience of acquiring the research permit becomes more complicated, when echoed with the accounts of colleagues who have a very different view.

Experiencing fieldwork

To many (foreign) researchers in Africa, getting a research cleared can be a long and arduous process. Gaining access to government institutions or 'sensitive' research subjects can be even more challenging. Some researchers exacerbate the situation by stating "that Rwandan politics actively controls the (scientific) knowledge production when deemed necessary by the regime and whenever possible" (Ingelaere 2009: 17) or by reporting about direct censorship of research findings (Reyntjens 2010: 29), to take examples relating to Rwanda. At its extreme, some colleagues in Rwanda, such as Larissa Begley, have felt exceedingly isolated and threatened by the government during fieldwork:

> *There's no one to tell me what I should do, because the government is watching my emails and after this incident I have no doubt that they are. I have to leave. It's three in the morning and I can't sleep. I can't sit still nor can I focus. I just need to get out of here (Begley 2009:3).*

I read these accounts by other colleagues only after I came back from fieldwork. During my 18-months of ethnographic research in rural Rwanda, I surely witnessed the constant co-presence of the authoritarian regime. Getting informants to speak about their everyday experiences, asking for interviews with employees in public institutions, touching issues about ethnicity, or receiving government documents were usually not without challenges. There is no doubt that these monitoring practices concerning foreign research by the Rwandan government can be extremely disturbing. However, it seems that I had serendipitously designed a research that was in line with government's initiatives and the future vision of the country. Consequently my experiences with government institutions were rendered to the complete opposites of what some colleagues reported. The following treasure from my field diary is one of these examples:

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1   The field notes are originally in German, my translation.

Field note 25 January 2012

> *K. called me today and asked if I could help out [a senior official] at the Ministry [of Health]. I agreed right away. [...] I am still amazed how easy it is to walk into a Ministry in Rwanda: very little security, nobody asks who I am, or what I want. [...] K. was waiting next to the elevator on the top floor. When he saw me coming, he somewhat nervously asked: "Do you have your credit card with you?" I confirmed, but I must have looked a bit confused. [...] When we entered the office of the senior official we exchanged some friendly greetings before he started a short lecture on the banking system in Rwanda. But then he started his request. His actual problem was that he exceeded the storage capacity of his email account and in order to top it up he would need a credit card that works for international payment systems. Since he does not have one, he would like to use mine and then pay me back in cash right away. Of course, I agreed to pay the 5 USD. [...] I believe this is one of these situations, where trust is built: to K., to the senior official, to the Ministry. It seems absurd (I could not imagine this in Germany), but it shows that I am now considered to be part of the small elitist network in Rwanda.*

These experiences I had during fieldwork sometimes put me in the awkward situation of defending the Rwandan government, which was not my attention at all. My own interest was not to decide what is good or what is bad but to carve out the politics that are behind these processes.

The politics of research permits

The polarized discussions about contemporary Rwanda make it difficult to situate almost every debate, including research permits, in the country. The process of getting a research permit might be interpreted as an expression of an authoritarian state that monitors and controls all kind of foreign activity. Susan Thompson, among others, has continuously reported about her challenges with public institutions in Rwanda as the following statement shows:

> *When the Director of Butare prison asked me to give the names of those I spoke to, I only had a list of their initials, their alleged crimes and age during genocide. Still, I refused to hand over even this information because I thought the government might harm my participants in some way. [...] The current government seeks to exert as much control as possible over researchers working on sensitive or political topics. The ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) goes to great lengths to ensure that foreign researchers and journalists do not question its restrictive narrative about Rwanda's recent history. [...] He then threatened to revoke my research permit "immediately" if I continue to refuse to tell him the names of the prisoners with whom I spoke. After a few days of impasse, I realised that neither the prison Director of Butare, nor representatives of the Minister's office, had found out the identities of the prisoners I had consulted (Thomson 2013: 139f.).*

In this example the research permit is used as a weapon to threaten the researcher when not applying to the local authorities. However, to turn this into a general argument about the Rwandan government is rather difficult, in particular when comparing these practices with other contexts in the region (see the other vignettes of this Working Paper). What is none-

theless important is that research permits play such a prominent role when doing research in Rwanda. Thus, the process itself becomes an important empirical situation to understand better the research context. For me the process was important to understand how bureaucratic structures of the state work, and how this influences scientific knowledge by for example urging for cooperation with local institutions and actively engaging in censorship. Reflecting on the process is a valuable exercise to understand my own position and to transfer the arguments of my research into different contexts. Therefore, I can only invite others to heed the call of this Working Paper: to understand one's own experience and challenges with research permits as an important heuristic for doing research in Africa.

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