

Comparative and complementary endeavours

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One of the explicit aims of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale is to augment knowledge and generate theory through comparative and complementary approaches. Scholarly exchange, cooperative endeavours and joint projects among researchers within the same department as well as transcending departmental boundaries are encouraged. This finds expression in thematically focused workshops, joint presentations, co-authored articles and edited volumes.

In January 2002 I returned from my field site in North West Cameroon where I had spent 14 months researching interethnic relations and identity politics among Mbororo (agro-pastoral Fulbe), Hausa and Grassfields people. Extensive discussion beforehand and exchange-visits with colleagues working on related issues in Burkina Faso and Benin helped to broaden the scope of and to integrate comparative perspectives into my research. Back in Halle I benefited from participating in internally organised workshops and international conferences that centred on themes relevant to my dissertation and on topics cross-cutting departmental boundaries and linking up individual researchers' interests. The following subjects were addressed and have subsequently been turned into dissertation chapters and (forthcoming) publications:

a) Comparative perspectives on farmer-herder relations, land rights and state policy in West Africa

Land rights and the politics of integration: Pastoralists' strategies in a comparative view is the title of a co-authored working paper (Working Paper Series of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale Nr. 48) by Andreas Dafinger and Michaela Pelican. The idea of a joint project emerged as a result of the workshop *The landed and the landless? Strategies of territorial integration and dissociation in Africa* organised by Andrea Behrends and Andreas Dafinger and held at the MPI in May 2002. We first gave a joint presentation for visitors from the Max Planck Society on the relationship of farmers, herders and the state in Burkina Faso and in North West Cameroon. Subsequently we applied a more comparative approach to our case materials and developed a theoretical framework to explain commonalities and differences in farmer-herder relations in south central Burkina Faso and North West Cameroon.

In both research sites the herders are Fulbe agro-pastoralists and form ethnic minorities within farmer-dominated societies. But while one case is marked by peaceful integration, the other is increasingly conflictual. These differences are interpreted via a background of different legal systems and modes of land use. In Burkina Faso, the historical and political setting supports an ideology of a *shared* landscape. This is best illustrated in the interspersed settlement pattern of farmers and herders who together form local communities, continuously negotiating spatial and social boundaries. In North West Cameroon, on the other hand, the territory is *divided* into exclusive farming and grazing areas. Here farmer-herder relations are largely guided by colonial and post-colonial legislation which has been introduced with the aim of reducing conflicts over land and landed resources. We argue that a *shared* use of land and landed resources encourages integration through permanent low level conflicts (Burkina Faso case), whereas a *divided* landscape and the allocation of exclusive land titles increases the potential for violent clashes (Cameroon case). Actors' strategies differ significantly in the two settings. In the Cameroonian example herders increasingly follow a dynamic and vocal approach, making explicit claims to exclusive tracts of land, becoming engaged in local politics and political networking. The Fulbe in the case of Burkina Faso, on the other hand, lay emphasis on keeping a low profile, adhering to an ideology of exit: they claim their rights to specific resources, but do not claim an overall, territorially perceived ownership of all landed assets within a delimited area.

In more general terms it becomes clear from the above comparisons that where land is primarily an economic asset, exclusion of others and struggles for exclusive ownership may be an adequate strategy. Where land is a social value, helping define social relations and positioning groups and individuals in the social hierarchy, sharing out the land to non-landowners may be much more profitable. In both cases the nation-state plays an important role, by providing opportunities and by more or less encouraging divided use of the land. It is

also the state, along with an increasingly market oriented economy, that will determine the prospects of these systems.

b) Property concepts and human-animal relations in an agro-pastoral community

The workshop *Collective and multiple forms of property in land and animals* organised by Günther Schlee, Patty Gray, Florian Stammmler and Michaela Pelican and held at the MPI in August 2002, joined participants from Department I and II with the aim of comparing concepts of property rights in land and animals and practices of animal husbandry across different ecological zones and political settings.

In my paper I focused on human-animal relations from economic and cultural perspectives. This overlapped thematically with Brian Donahoe's (Indiana University, MPI) presentation on Siberia¹. Applying Tim Ingold's² theoretical framework of hunting versus pastoral populations to his case material, Donahoe illustrated how human-animal relations among the Tozhu-Tyva are characterised by trust and respect, while among the Tofa, wild animals and domesticated reindeer are mainly seen in terms of their economic value, i.e. to be dominated and exploited. A similar shift in the human-animal relationship seems to have occurred among the Mbororo in North West Cameroon. The Mbororo conceive of their cattle as basic production means in terms of livelihood and social status. At the same time, they have personal and close relationships with their animals, especially those belonging to inherited cattle-lineages. Socio-economic and ecological conditions over the past century have encouraged meat over milk production, to which the Mbororo reacted with economic diversification and increased market production. In many families part of the herd is designated for social and economic reproduction and part for market production. Accordingly, the two sections underlie different herd management rationales which entail divergences in human-animal relations (e.g. in terms of naming systems for animals). From a theoretical perspective this implies that the shift from trust and respect to domination and exploitation in human-animal relations is gradual. Potentially and practically both attitudes co-exist, though applied to different herd sections.

The case study on the peri-urban Fulbe in North Cameroon presented by Mark Moritz (UCLA) offered an excellent opportunity for regional comparison³. Moritz illustrated how changing ecological conditions in Cameroon's Far North made intensification necessary and how pastoral intensification coupled with Islamic notions of private property led to an individualisation of livestock ownership. In North West Cameroon ecological and economic conditions as well as the interpretation and instrumentalisation of Islamic ideology take different forms. Here Islamic ideology has been invoked to determine women's economic role, namely their engagement in the sales of milk and milk products. This part of Mbororo pastoral economy has become conflated with antagonistic interpretations of pastoral and Islamic ideologies and is a key issue in the debate on what it means to be an 'authentic Pullo' (sing. of Fulbe) or a 'good Muslim'. In comparing Fulbe strategies in North West Cameroon and Cameroon's Far North it becomes clear that, though situated within the same country, historical and political backgrounds, ecological and economic conditions and the wider social setting vary significantly. Just as these conditions differ and change over time, pastoral practices and ideology remain in flux, offering a wide variety of potential strategies and alternatives.

c) Interethnic friendship: a factor of social cohesion?

The theme of friendship was introduced to the researchers of Department I by Martine Guichard, who has been working on interethnic friendship in Benin and Cameroon and on the discipline's historical and theoretical engagement with the topic⁴. A number of us integrated

¹ Donahoe, Brian. 2002. 'Trust' or 'domination'? The Tozhu-Tyva and the Tofa and their differing relationships to the reindeer they raise and the wild animals they hunt. Paper presented at the workshop *Collective and multiple form of property in land and animals*. Halle/Saale. August 19-21, 2002.

² Ingold, Tim. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment. Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skills*. London, New York: Routledge.

³ Moritz, Mark. 2002. Individual livestock ownership in Fulbe family herds: The effects of intensification and Islam on pastoral production systems in the Far North of Cameroon. Paper presented at the workshop *Collective and multiple form of property in land and animals*. Halle/Saale. August 19-21, 2002.

⁴ Guichard, Martine. 1996. Über die Beziehung zwischen Fulbe und Bariba im Borgou. In: Günther Schlee und Karin Werner (eds.). *Inklusion und Exklusion*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag. pp. 107-132; Guichard, Martine. 2000a. L'étrangeté comme code de communication interethnique. Les relations entre agropasteurs peuls et paysans bariba

related questions into our research and, subsequently, participated in the workshop *Friendship, descent and alliance* organised by Tilo Grätz, Youssouf Diallo and Martine Guichard and held at the MPI in December 2002. My paper on ethnic and gender specific differences of interethnic friendship in North West Cameroon was based on a joint project with Tilo Grätz and Barbara Meier (University of Münster) which resulted in a special series on *Friendship in West Africa* (Working Paper Series of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Nr. 53-56).

Researching interethnic relations and identity politics in North West Cameroon, interethnic friendship relationships were initially conceived as cross-cutting ties that complement intra-group relations and potentially facilitate social integration⁵. Furthermore, it was assumed that Mbororo women's interethnic relationships contribute to the reduction and resolution of conflicts while men's interaction is largely defined by socio-political hierarchy⁶. In comparing my data on Mbororo men's and women's notions and practices of friendship, significant differences emerged: Mbororo men evaluate friendship in terms of trust, sympathy, moral and financial assistance and reciprocity. Women, on the other hand, emphasise mutual affection, shared experience, emotional support and gift-exchange as main components of friendship relationships. These differences are interpreted against the background of a system and an ideology of gendered socio-economic roles and personae, whereby men carry the primary responsibility for the family's subsistence and are attributed characteristics of sternness and authority, among others, while women are seen as more emotional and compassionate⁷. Similarly, when applied to the context of interethnic relations, the gendered characters generate different modes of interaction: Mbororo women seem to maintain mostly informal relationships, while men's relationships are more formalised and shaped by economic factors and socio-political hierarchy. The question emerges: Do women's and men's modes of interaction with non-Mbororo function complementarily, enhancing the Mbororo's social integration in the local community? Though there are indicators supporting this hypothesis in the case of Fulbe groups in other areas, where milk sales are more common and interaction with non-Mbororo subsequently more frequent⁸, this is seemingly not the case for the Mbororo in the Grassfields. No correlation between men's and women's interethnic friendship relationships was apparent. Men and women engage in friendship independent of each other, and relationships are kept as a private affair between the persons involved. The initial assumption of interethnic friendship as a factor of social cohesion has to be relativised. The frequency and relevance of interethnic friendship among Mbororo, Hausa and Grassfields people should not be overestimated. In terms of social security and emotional support, intra-group relationships seem to be more important. In terms of social integration in an overarching system (i.e. the local community), interethnic friendship relationships seem to play a minor role and are overshadowed by economic and socio-political relations.

d) Getting along in the Grassfields, a video documentary

Another relevant aspect of my work concerns the use of video, photography and role playing in research, data analysis and representation. Thanks to the generous support of the Max Planck Institute I was able to produce a preliminary film in cooperation with Judith Orland introducing the fieldwork situation and illustrating methods of data-collection and feedback processes. In terms of a conceptual approach, we did not attempt to make a 'classical-style' ethnographic documentary about one ethnic group, being portrayed by a 'neutral' third party. Instead, we intended to illustrate the anthropologist's endeavour dealing with the complexity

du Borgou (Nord-Bénin). In: Youssouf Diallo und Günther Schlee (eds.). *L'ethnicité peule dans des contextes nouveaux*. Paris: Karthala. pp. 93-128; Guichard, Martine. 2000b. "Something to hide?" *Reflections on interethnic relationships and friendship ties with regard to the Fulbe of northern Benin and northern Cameroon*. Presentation at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 05/12/2000. Halle/Saale.

⁵ Gluckman, Max. 1966. *Custom and conflict in Africa*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. For a critical discussion of the integrative propensity of cross-cutting ties see Schlee, Günther. 1997. Cross-cutting ties and interethnic conflict: the example of Gabbra, Oroma and Rendille. In: K. Fukui and E. Kurimoto and M. Shigeta. (eds.). *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Paper of 13th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. II. Kyoto: Shokado Book Sellers. pp. 577-596; Schlee, Günther. 2000. Identitätskonstruktionen und Parteinahme: Überlegungen zur Konflikttheorie. *Sociologus* 10/1: 64-89.

⁶ Boutrais, Jean. 1984. Entre nomadisme et sédentarité : les Mbororo à l'Ouest du Cameroun. In: Chantal Blanc-Pamard. (ed.) 1984. *Le développement rural en question. Paysages, espaces ruraux, systèmes agraires*. Paris: Editions de l'ORSTOM. pp. 225-256.

⁷ Riesman, Paul. 1998 [1977]. *Freedom in Fulani Social Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁸ Information by Martine Guichard; Boutrais 1984; Burnham, Philip. 1980. Opportunity and constraint in a Savanna society: The Gbaya of Meiganga, Cameroon. London et al: Academic Press.

and dynamics of ethnic interaction. The way we selected and edited the video-sequences represents this process of trying to make sense of the rich field data and to link it up with the research question. To encourage the viewer to develop his/her own associations and interpretations we decided to do without a narrative-style explanatory voice-over and to keep commentaries as limited as possible.

In terms of content, the themes addressed are interethnic relations and identity politics in a culturally, religiously and ethnically complex setting. The first part of the film links cultural policies of the Cameroonian government with cultural activities in village life. The current government contributes to raising consciousness of ethnic identities and social difference by encouraging social and ethnic groups to participate in national festivals. Parades, songs and dances presented by the various groups are performances of ethnic, cultural and social identities and, at the same time, manifestations of their participation in the political economy on the local and the national level. These performances are based on cultural activities in village life, i.e. rituals and ceremonies, which are guided by social norms and restrictions that, in turn, affect participation in national festivals. Muslim adult women, for example, find it highly problematic to perform in public. Hence, their confined participation in national festivals is mainly a political statement. For youths, on the other hand, such events represent legitimate occasions to escape adult surveillance, to see and be seen and to socialise. The second part of the film starts with an overview of the market scenery illustrating how various groups contribute to the village economy and how economic activities tend to be associated with ethnicity, gender and religious affiliations. Interviews with market participants represent individuals' assessments of their economic involvement against the background of socio-cultural conceptions and economic constraints. Finally, the film also says something about the interrelation of the anthropologist with the 'field'. In the third part we see the anthropologist as participant and actor in the local setting. We listen to the comments of informants – now becoming authors themselves – reflecting on the audio-visual ethnographic venture. Muslim women perceive their participation in role plays and films and the prospect of being seen in foreign countries as a chance to transcend social boundaries and present themselves to the public without contravening social and religious norms. Other spectators point at the reflective capacity of ethnographic film: through confronting their reality of ethnic and cultural heterogeneity and plurality they recognise the needs and benefits of getting along and learning from each other. Contributors also argue that viewing ethnographic video footage helped them to better understand technical aspects of film-making and the nature of anthropological research. This was reflected in increased enthusiasm and active participation by the local population in all aspects of my subsequent research.

The film was presented to and discussed within the MPI, at anthropological conferences and with visual anthropologists. In order to become a completed production it needs conceptual and technical amendments, but as a preliminary version it has been successfully incorporated in public presentations (e.g. at the *Long Night of Sciences* or the *Africa Week* in Halle) and anthropological teaching.

Selected sequences of the audio-visual data are integrated into my thesis for analytical and illustrative purposes, reflecting the multimedial character of my dissertation work. In the same way, the comparative and complementary endeavours find expression in substantial parts of my Ph.D. thesis and have significantly contributed to the refinement and precision of my theoretical arguments.