THE ARCTIC UNIVERSITY OF NORWAY

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

ETHNODRAMA

The making of a dramatized ethnographic film to give collaborators a voice

Master's thesis in VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY
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ABSTRACT

The production project of a fictional film through the collaboration between an ethnographer and a theater group from Ngaoundéré, Cameroon resulted in a film genre coined 'ethnodrama'. This model of collaboration limits the authorship of filmmakers while preventing the ethnographic relevance of the film to be corrupted by them. This thesis describes the creative process behind the development of the films that were made following ethnodramatic procedures while analyzing each constituent of the genre and of the topic selected for the film that was made during fieldwork. The ethnodramatic film called *Accueil* explores the welcoming of people from different settings in the Cameroonian region of Adamaoua, most prominently refugees and immigrants, while *Accueil: Behind-the-stories* is the master's film associated with this thesis that studies these creative procedures. The use of fiction to represent truth and the conditions under which it is advisable to be used are discussed among the theories that this paper approaches. Models of collaboration that inspired this project are also compared to how ethnodrama engages with the discourse within anthropological filmmaking as a collaborative model itself. Finally, an analysis of each stage of the project up to its completion precedes the conclusion.

Keywords: acting, Africa, authorship, Cameroon, collaboration, directing, ethnofiction, ethnography, fiction, film, immigration, legends, mobility, myth, theater, truth, visual anthropology.

PREFACE

Once upon a time in a warm land widely bathed in sunshine, a happily married couple celebrated the birth of their newest offspring. As they had already formed quite a numerous family for their standards and resources, the parents decided the newborn would be their last child. As such, the boy unwillingly bore the title of being the youngest son, with all the glories and burdens bestowed by it. Even though there is no wisdom in generalizing, the youngest child usually looks up to an older sibling that receives special admiration from his parents. It was not different in this boy's case concerning his older brother.

Many other events were part of his childhood and led him through his future pathways. It could be mentioned here the scarce wealth of his kin. Growing up in contact with muddy streets and humble houses, the boy would hardly be impressed by the adversities of life. The fact that he was used to living in a diverse environment regarding colors completely different from his own has also made this boy understand from an early age that a different chest does not alter the treasure within, a thought sadly unshared by many around the world.

As the boy grew older, he could not avoid going through some forms of social harassment that were always remembered, but unable to prevent him from taking over the leadership in most of his future projects. During academic years, his journey led him into becoming a director of amateur theater plays, despite having never been taught acting before. At the same time, anthropological and ethnic issues had drawn his curiosity, contributing to his choice regarding undergraduate and graduate studies.

Studying was never an easy task, though. To advance in his scholar career, the young man had to move away to a different city and depend on his relatives to sponsor his stay. As the help they were able to provide was not so substantial, any miscalculation of the expenses or an unpredicted debt would be followed by nights of hunger now and then. The young man would never be stopped by adversities, though, and kept moving on towards his dreams.

During the master's program that he was attending to address the social issues of his concern, a fantastic offer changed the way he would relate to his skills as a director. Our man, at the time some months away from becoming three decades old, started a friendship with another student born in a different continent with whom he co-directed a film that dramatizes ethnographic content about the country where it was filmed. It was a fictional story about two men in Africa who conflicted but eventually turned out to have a relationship of mutual respect and admiration that is more than amicable, but fraternal. If reality reflects the ending of his film, our character, along with his newfound brother, are going to live happily ever after.

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The story that prefaces this thesis is about me, a Brazilian master's student of Visual Anthropology at the University of Tromsø in Norway. That same text can also be used to tell the story of Lawan Pascal, a Cameroonian master's student at the University of Ngaoundéré. Lawan was my collaborator during the 90-day fieldwork that I conducted in Ngaoundéré, capital of the Adamaoua region of Cameroon, from April 12th to July 11th, 2019. He was the president of a theater club at the university to whom I was introduced after I arrived in the city.

His group of students was composed of Cameroonians and foreigners alike who were given autonomy to write a story to be acted out by the club alongside non-actors from those whereabouts. The only guidance I had provided them as a possible starting point in this early stage of the process was the theme of *accueil*, the French word for the act of welcoming. It could be part of a story about how people in that country accept those who are different, immigrants *pro tem*. I tried my best to have as little interference as possible on the script so that my own perspectives would not alter the narrative through which their perception on those topics was expressed. After the story was finished, I started to intervene in the project as a co-director of the film, along with Lawan, but I still made sure not to remove any of the scenes that they had envisioned, whether it being of my preference or not.

The idea of performing a project in these exact terms had been with me long before I was accepted in the Visual Anthropology program, but it relied on many unlikely events such as the existence of a theater club in Ngaoundéré, which I had never heard of and their willingness to collaborate with me. Therefore, I placed this project amidst other plans in the fieldwork project that I had to present to the university before traveling but did not discuss its acceptance with my professors until I successfully concluded it in the field. That was because my fellow students and I were never explicitly told that fictional projects were a possibility for us, despite our constant exposure to the discussions on "the use of fiction" or "the meaning of truth" in ethnographic films throughout our course, from the enacted scenes in Robert Flaherty's films to the ethnofictional films that Jean Rouch made.

The debate in Anthropology about how to portray reality in its most authentic form started with one of its strands well represented by Margaret Mead (*in* Brand, 1976), who defended that the ethnographer should attempt to achieve an optimal scope of human activity by using a still camera and avoiding any artistic use of the equipment. This would be helpful by establishing a distance from the subject and the littlest influence from the filmmaker on the material collected. These attempts for having reality captured in its truest form have ranged from the need of using tripods to the concepts of "privileged camera", such as a surveillance video that would benefit from being hidden, bringing to surface the true behavior of people.

Ignoring this objective and focusing on priorities outside of this debate, I argue that the translation of reality into any medium, be it text, video, drawing, and the likes of them, will be directly or indirectly done by a human with a biased perspective and by a pre-selection of content. When it comes to ethnography, the temptation of registering reality without missing any detail is confronted with its impossibility. James Clifford states that ethnographic truths are "inherently *partial*— committed and incomplete. (...) Once accepted and built into ethnographic art, a rigorous sense of partiality can be a source of representational tact."

"Ethnographic writings can properly be called fictions in the sense of 'something made or fashioned', the principal burden of the word's Latin root, *fingere*." (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) Instead of forcing an unachievable truth, I opted for resourcing to Rouch's famous sentence: *fiction is the only way to penetrate reality*. His predecessor Robert Flaherty also said, similarly, that *one has often to distort a thing to catch its true spirit*, in a reference to his actors reclaiming "practices and behaviors that were no longer a part of daily life." (LaRocca, 2017)

Therefore, I considered that a more optimized use of the already limited time I had for my fieldwork was to replace this unachievable quest for "truth" for embracing the inherent characteristic that every human being demonstrates from an early age, the ability to construct our own ways to interpret reality. In all social groups over the ages, fiction has served the purpose of comprising reality in a dramatized form to allow us to portray what our cognitive systems have learned from the environment so that others can understand our message more clearly.

I intended to create a film to be evaluated by how relevant its depiction of a given society is, rather than having any demand for veracity as a definitive criterium, given that this is not prioritized in the very origin of the project. Contrary to some voices that made me afraid of having my idea rejected for being too experimental, it was accepted by my professors as the theme of this thesis. In the end, the project happened more efficiently than I had predicted, having taken only one-sixth of my total period in the field to be arranged, developed, and executed.

THEME 1: IMMIGRATION
BACKGROUND

My preference for the topic of migration was probably due to my upbringing in a city in Brazil known for its military academy in which officials from all over the country reside with their families to complete their studies. Every time a new student arrived in the middle of the school year, I tended to be the first to make contact and ask about their lives. My inclination to help those who are trying to adapt and feel included has expanded to a major scale, including concerns about people born in a territory whose society abides by certain rules that might threaten the individual's lives in case they stick to their own selves; when people feel displaced by personal characteristics that prevent them from

being socially accepted; or when they are physically outside their homeland and therefore have to cope with all difficulties, both internal and external, that that situation brings upon them. The dissonance between out-of-the-norm points of view and expectations that individuals experience in a determined social setting had always been of my interest.

I later moved to São Paulo, the biggest city in the Southern hemisphere where the presence of migrants is so strong that it was not uncommon to meet people who were not born there or that could not even speak our language. When I was accepted for the Visual Anthropology program in Norway, I started looking for stories from people who had migrated to São Paulo based on my interest in the theme of feeling out-of-place, especially territorially. The first people that I unexpectedly met were from the Democratic Republic of Congo[1]. First, I got in touch with a former priest who had moved to Brazil before the conflicts in his country had become more intense. He was working as a cook in the restaurant where I was having lunch one day and we started talking, despite my basic French, about his life there. Our conversation followed to an interview in which he explained to me his status as a foreigner, his marriage to a Brazilian woman, issues regarding documentation, access to public services, and prejudice he had been through in my country.

I was later introduced to another Congolese who gave me a very special interview. She was a lawyer who had moved to Brazil after a series of events she preferred to remain confidential in my notes. The most important part of this interview is how much she confronted me. She exposed how unprepared I was on the subject I was willing to look into. I was provoked for the very reason I was motivating myself to make those interviews. My shallow idea of a film in these first conversations regarded finding a traditional folk tale of their ethnic groups to make a film about, without considering the consequences of my work.

She referred to many Anthropology students who had looked for her, eager to learn more about her culture but incapable of directing their research towards an actual change to the problems that refugees go through. Despite being legally accepted in Brazil, she felt abandoned by the State upon her arrival. No identification document had been provided, which caused her not to be able to use the public health system. She contrasted it to the kind of welcoming (*accueil*, in her words) that is provided to other Congolese refugees in France, for example, where an interview was held to identify psychological issues that the person was going through and to allocate and provide a living to that person.

I left the interview completely embarrassed by my ignorance and by the superfluity of my intentions. It provided me the shame necessary to make me more ambitious in my research. For making

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[1] Also known as DRC or Congo Kinshasa.

a fictional film relevant to current issues, I ought to include them as a starting point for the fictional stories that would be created for the film. I focused on researching migration problems in my first year of the master's program, regardless of what would come out of it. And even if I did not manage to make a satisfactory fictional film out of my research, these studies would still be used to make another kind of project for my fieldwork.

GOING TO THE FIELD

As a student at the University of Tromsø, I was told the VISCAM Project would be willing to aid students looking for making their fieldwork in Cameroon, a country in central Africa that receives numerous immigrants and refugees from the neighboring countries that were going through armed conflicts. Considering the danger of moving to DRC under the circumstances it was going through, it was much wiser to make my project in a place where migrants are welcomed instead of following them from the conflict zones that are forcing them to leave. Besides this safety, I was also provided the necessary fieldwork grants I would not be able to afford otherwise, a provision that made my project feasible.

When the airplane landed in Yaoundé, the Cameroonian capital, some misunderstandings caused the contact person that was arranged for me not to be there. After some negotiation, the officers allowed me to sleep in the airport seats until he arrived the next morning. It was my first impression of how similar social contracts are played there in comparison to Brazil. While in Norway some people have denied selling me a product if one mere Norwegian crown was missing, back in Brazil people are more open to this elasticity of the social rules, as detailed since 1936 when the *homem cordial* myth of our people was published (Holanda, 1995). I could find this same characteristic in the Cameroonians, maybe even more strongly.

The next day, in the station whose train would take me up north to my final destination, some people tried to trick me into paying them so that my four bags would be allowed in the barely existing space I had for them since I had opted for the lowest and cheapest class. Little did they know that as a Brazilian I was experienced in such wicked techniques and so I avoided them all by all means necessary, to the extent of stomping on my suitcase so that it could fit in the rail company's measurement grid. The soldiers who were controlling access to the train and walking firmly by us during the travel were very tall and made everybody silent when they arrived. In the middle of the night, maybe 8 hours after our departure, a police officer requested my passport, which was hard to take from my backpack provided it was under eight squeezed legs of my fellow travelers and mine as well. When he yelled at me asking why I was not guarding my country instead of being there, I remained silenced in shock.

While in Norway I was able to have a somewhat horizontal treatment to people who exerted certain authority on me, such as police officers or professors, during my three months in that country I realized that the hierarchical system was followed more strictly. This was also true in the script meetings that Lawan led at the theater club and even at the birthday party that I gave him, which looked more like the formal meetings that I had at the university than the parties that I am used to. During its first hours, people were waiting patiently in silence before everybody arrived, and then took turns to use the word and make birthday speeches to him. This formality seems to be a result of the meetings held by the French people that colonized that area. I believe that how Brazilians follow hierarchical processes would be somewhere in between Norway and Cameroon, depending on how we are approached. Considering that the French method of colonization is known to have been the most brutal against cultural traditions, and since the Brazilian independence took place long ago, we do not follow the customs learned from the Portuguese any longer when we want to express our respect for an event.

NGAOUNDÉRÉ

After 15 exhausting hours of sentinelling the 4 separate compartments where my bags were hidden in the wagon, I could finally see Ngaoundéré from the windows. I was under the heat of 10 in the morning and the air was already dry. The place was so low in humidity that a giant artificial lake had been built close to the university so that it would keep the climate balanced. The vegetation was sparse and the streets were made of dirt. The period I stayed there was exactly during the country's rainy season, so it wasn't as harsh as it could have been. Every day when I left the precarious room I was renting, whose cracked blue walls reminded me of my grandmother's home, I stepped on the muddy paths reminiscent of some streets in my hometown in the state of Rio de Janeiro. I felt very much at home in that place, much more than how I felt in Norway.

Ngaoundéré is the capital of Adamaoua, the only region of Cameroon that is not named after a geographic reference. Located between the North and Center regions, this place is what there is left from a large emirate named after the *modibbo* Adama, who established it in the 19th century on the territory that is now known as southern Nigeria and northern Cameroon. As he was a jihadist hero of the Fulbe[2] people, the place I was residing in was heavily populated by this ethnic (and religious) group, which could be noted by their attires, the *bobo*, and by hearing them speak their language, the Fufuldé.

When slavery was forbidden in 1967, Christian missionaries took care of the liberation and thus converted many former slaves, who started attending schools in the European model. Many of the

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[2] Also known as Peul in French or, when referring to either the ethnic group or the language, Fulani.

first generations of graduated people in northern Cameroon are actually descendants of slaves. (Waage, 2018) As Christians advanced their missions from the littoral region northward and the Muslims expanded from above, the region of Adamaoua became the meeting point where both religions coexisted. When a scholar of the university invited me for lunch in his place, I realized that the kitchen linen placed on the floor for our meal accompanied by sophisticated crockery and cutlery was of Christmas patterns, although he was a Muslim.

Ngaoundéré, the capital of the Adamaoua region, is a fast-growing city. It has expanded from a population of 55,000 in 1950 to 600,000 in the 1990s and is now estimated to have 1.46 million inhabitants.[3] This increase was already high due to people looking for better job opportunities but has also been boosted by the armed conflicts and wars that occur in neighboring countries, causing many refugees to arrive in the city looking for shelter. The French-speaking refugees easily disguise among the population and look for informal jobs working as carpenters or in moto-taxi.

The UNHCR[4] document for Livelihoods Strategy (2018-2020) states that 28% of Central African Republic refugees choose Adamaoua as their destination. This High Commissioner was installed in Cameroon in 1982 to address refugee concerns, such as the agreement for voluntary return of refugees to the Central African Republic on June 29th, 2019. (Pascal, 2019) Unfortunately, some of their strategies have struggled to provide good results in the last years, especially because they tend to look at the migration issues between African countries through the same scope as what takes place in Europe. It is necessary to take into consideration some social structures that determine the solution of problems by using the wisdom of local authorities, not always the force of governmental entities.

Just like the encounter of forest and savannah that takes place in that city, Ngaoundéré has been described as a "haven of peace" where different groups unite regarding religion, nationality, and also ethnicity. Among the 285 ethnic groups present in Cameroon, the most prevalent ones in that area are the just mentioned Fulbe, the Gbaya, the Mboum, and the Dii. This means that most people there are polyglots, especially when the colonizers' tongues are added. Before World War I Germany had control of the country, then France and England shared it with the latter controlling only a part of its southwest. These three languages are still taught in school, with the inclusion of Chinese in some places. I once heard words from 4 different tongues being included in the same sentence. The use of *francanglais* was particularly fun to hear, such as in "*On va* do how?", "How will we do it?". I was once surprised by teenagers greeting me with "Nihao!" believing I was one of the many Chinese people and corporations that buy pieces of land to build in their country.

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[3] According to the newspaper *L'oeil du Sahel*, January 16th, 2019.
[4] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

To work closer to the students, I rented a bedroom in Dang, the closest area to the University campus. There I met people from various academic backgrounds, nationalities, and religions, striving to acquire a higher education despite the lack of vacant positions and the bribery that often determines who is accepted in the exams for working in public office. My project was inspired by and directed to these people who survive on money from relatives dreaming perhaps unachievable dreams. Maybe this connection is because, all things considered, I am just one of them.

WORKING WITH THE THEATER CLUB
PRESIDENT LAWAN PASCAL

Ten days after I arrived in Ngaoundéré, I met with my colleague from the VISCAM Project who had arranged my stay in Ngaoundéré close to his place and told him about my idea of making a fictional film with a theater club. Little did I know that the theater club not only existed but that its president lived right beside my friend's home. The following day he introduced me to Lawan Pascal who took me to his place where we had a long conversation about the project, which I captured on camera.

Lawan was born in 1990 when I was already four months old. We are both the youngest of our families; he has five older siblings and I have two. These are average numbers for the rural area where he was raised and for the peripherical neighborhood where I grew up. Our eldest siblings are two women who both play the role of keeping the unity of the family. The voice of his sister can be heard in my master's film saying "once upon a time" after her mother finishes her tale and before I start speaking about my project.

His family is highly connected to the Norwegians who lived in their neighborhood more than two decades ago. When I traveled to his homeplace, Lawan showed me the fruit trees that had been planted by them so that the locals would always have what to eat, the now inactive electricity poles they had built, and the house where the Norwegian couple held artistic activities for their own children together with those in Lawan's family around the age of five. In the three months that I spent there, I cannot recall another moment in which Lawan's eyes shone as much, reliving that time of his life when the struggles for a living had not hit him as hard yet.

His relationship to the Norwegians was present in the very essence of our work together as it was the reason behind Lawan's acceptance of a white foreigner to work alongside him as a co-director. Contrary to the thought of some of his colleagues, who directly confronted him for making this project with a white person for such a long period receiving nothing in return, Lawan never treated me as a different person because of my color. I remember he cautiously waited before telling me the verbal contends that he had with his friends because of me, but as a matter of fact I was more than amazed for knowing he made his stance in my favor against this kind of discrimination.

For instance, one of them was a student of Museology who was polite and friendly in my presence despite reluctant to accept me to film her. On a certain day, she told him about an experience she had with a group of French researchers who had been there promising to involve the Cameroonians in an academic project but in the end disappeared and have not contacted them since. He was afraid that I would be upset with her, but I found her resistance based on a factual experience that enhanced her stereotype of me. So, starting from that day, I became even closer to her, always making jokes about how I also come from a poor family and a colonized country, a piece of information of which most Cameroonians I have met are not aware, especially given the stigma they are subdued to for all their lives as the maximum representation of what colonization means.

Another case was regarding a Chadian student who lives in the same '*cité*' or 'city'[5] as Lawan. One evening Lawan invited some Christian friends for a worshipping ceremony in his bedroom and allowed me to film it. Confronted by this young man about why Lawan should not have allowed me to do it, he replied: "If I had the same mindset as you have, I would not have introduced you to the landlord here and intervened for you to get a room. I would have thought that you are a Chadian, therefore a very violent person. But I did not care about your nationality, but about who you are as a person." Lawan told him that I was a man from Brazil who did not want to take advantage of them, to what the Chadian responded: "Hm, better Brazilian than French..."

The color of our skins or the nationality and ethnic groups of his friends never played a role in how Lawan treated me or anybody else, at least in the period I stayed there. That is what he learned as a child from the Norwegians who treated him and his siblings in the same way as their own children. In one of our interviews, maybe especially because I did not have the camera facing him at the time, Lawan became emotional and sobbed when I asked him if he sees himself as different from other Cameroonians.

He answered affirmatively and justified by explaining moments in which he could see how much his friends or relatives would give up on some projects for not believing in their own capacity to prosper in anything. For instance, on one occasion during his teenage years, Lawan spent nights awake using a computer application to produce a song for a contest in which his friends wanted to participate but could not afford the production costs. The result was so good that both the contest organizers and his friends thought it had been made in a professional studio.

Unlike them, Lawan would not accept this mentality that is so often placed upon Africans, for he does not see himself as inferior or superior to anybody else. In his upbringing he had a hard time understanding why the other children would take his food away, incorrectly assuming the Norwegians

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[5] This is the name given to walled communities of a few bedrooms or houses belonging to the same owner.

had given it to him, while also making fun of their accent when they called his name. Despite all this, he was able to play with his classmates and let these bad moments in the past after he left school.

Out of all his brothers and sisters, the one who was able to make the best use of this connection to Norway was the second of Lawan's siblings, a man who traveled there to become an evangelical shepherd and now lives with his wife and children in Yaoundé. I spent my last week of fieldwork in his place, where I was able to ask him about the sensation of being able to provide a beautiful home and financial support to his relatives including Lawan. His only hesitation was with some relatives who did not make responsible use of these resources, which was not the case of Lawan, and he agreed that it feels good to be able to help his family live in a good house.

The predominance of pictures from this specific brother and his children in the house where their parents live made me pay attention to the way Lawan perceived him. Similar to my relationship with my own brother, I could see that they would not talk to each other so spontaneously, as if Lawan was afraid of doing something that might cause a bad impression. It might be just a sensation, but it felt to me as if Lawan was not comfortable with the financial aid he receives from his brother for his studies, as if he would feel better with himself if he was able to independently fund his studies and help his family.

This is another part of Lawan's life that I relate to mine. When I moved to a different city for my studies but had to rely on the little money that my mother could send me at the time, I once had to choose between buying one piece of clothing that I needed or being able to have dinner for one week. By "dinner" I mean a small hot dog I used to eat every evening. In Lawan's case, I would sometimes arrive at his place in the evening and find him still involuntarily fasting because the money sent to him was almost over, and then I would immediately invite him to eat with me.

During the 90 days I spent with him, I could not see Lawan as anything less than a twin brother. I was lucky to find somebody who shared many aspects of my history, numerous similarities in the present, and hopefully a great future for both of us. I can see how these similarities were important for me to access him and build a project together. Even though Sarah Elder prefers contrasting collaborative spaces, she recognizes the ease in representation when individuals are similar. "...If makers are of the same gender, ethnicity, or class as their subjects, then their films or videos will without question represent their subject accurately and responsibly." (Elder, 1995)

Our connection was also related to our condition as master's students in Social Sciences. After 8 years in the university, Lawan was still unsure if he would ever be accepted for a position in public office or if he would have to go back to the village where he grew up with his parents to work on the farm until the end of his days. He is one of many from a generation that was the first to experience having higher education but could not find enough positions after graduating. The other students that were part of his theater club came from various neighboring countries to the University of Ngaoundéré

and found in the theater club a place to find friends and to be accepted. One of them even asked to make a speech in the last of our group meetings to thank Lawan and the others for making her feel welcome after moving away from her country to study.

The presence of international students in his theater club was related to Lawan's inherent acceptance of people from different nationalities. Once he started taking part as an ordinary member in the theater club, Lawan realized that the former president was only favoring his friends, mostly other Cameroonians, and being too tolerant of their absences and unproductive behavior. Nonetheless, Lawan worked hard and demonstrated his skills to the theater club until he became the president himself. Under his administration, friendship and nationality no longer played a role in deciding who among the members would be called to participate in the projects, but hard work started to be the only relevant variable for having merit in the group.

**Lawan being greeted by Narcisse Mouelle Kombi, Minister of Arts and Culture of Cameroon,
after a presentation of the theater club that he directed.**

Lawan had already chosen immigration as the theme he was writing about in his master's thesis in Political and International Relations History, published four months after my departure.

> Regarding personal reasons: having often had the opportunity to work with the UNHCR, in particular on the issue of the management of refugees and their integration, our motivation was aroused for carrying out a work that shows, in detail, the data collected in the field. These increasingly numerous refugees are taking the court state, hence our concern for posing the question of the integration of refugees from Touboro by the UNHCR, which sometimes takes the place of the local administration. (Pascal, 2019)

Coincidentally, the group of students that Lawan introduced to me was composed of people from many different nationalities and also of natives from that land who composed the ideal team to write a script about immigration. Their international background is what provided the empirical knowledge necessary for writing a story on that topic.

This thesis is inspired by three concepts that have taken different roles in each stage of the project. In this introduction chapter, I am providing a brief description of the role that **immigration** plays in my choice for a theme and its relevance in the field to where I have traveled. The Theoretical Approach chapter will deal with my conceptualization of how **fiction** has been used by humans to tell stories and why its use in ethnographies is valid. In the Methodology chapter, I describe different models of **collaboration** and try to define which collaborative approach felt more appropriate for the project that I conducted, particularly.

Before I go any further, I am going to analyze each one of these topics through the kinds of experience that were withheld by the members of the club and that enabled them to help me finish this project so successfully. Their knowledge of migratory issues allowed them to develop our topic due to their past on-site experience. Their ability to produce coherent fictional narratives to be played was because of their theatrical experience. My attempt to be positioned as an equal collaborator was only possible because I was working with a group that had academic experience and so was able to understand the emic and etic perspectives I was going after in the project. This triad of pillars will also be used to present the *problems* I found in performing my research and the *methods and tools* that we used to solve them. These elements formed the *research questions* whose solutions I tried to find, apply, and analyze in my fieldwork.

Research Question #1: How can valid ethnographic content be obtained in short fieldwork?

The first problem that occurred to me was that ethnographic knowledge is ideally acquired after a long period in the field, whereas three months is such a short period that some would not even call this a 'fieldwork'. When it comes to fictional narratives this development requires even more time from the anthropologist who ventures into creating a story. Even when relying on the inclusion of improvisations from the locals, the ethnographer needs to have incorporated the living of that place from the inside before determining what kind of setting would demonstrate life in that place. The exact three months that I used to collect data in Cameroon would never suffice for me to develop my own "truthful" narrative and then simply ask the locals to perform a story that I assumed to be valid. The solution for that issue was to find people who had lived all their lives in that place and whose on-site experience would have provided more than enough knowledge on their own society.

The perception of the 'other' has been constantly changed over the years, not only as different points of view (as the classic example of an elephant in the room) but as a chained degression that advances towards its disappearance. To European anthropologists, Brazilians were othered until Brazilian anthropologists defined that the other were people from indigenous groups, who are now entirely capable of becoming anthropologists in academia themselves, othering yet another group. The

first ethnographer who tried to abdicate this process by realizing that his subjects had a perspective through which they saw the world was Bronisław Malinowski. He considered essential for his studies mastering the language of the place where one is living and also finding people who are insightful in their societies. Even if the anthropologists stay in the field for a couple of years, they can only claim that they entirely understand those particular people if they *grow up with them*.

This is the trick I used for circumventing my time constraints: I stripped myself of my pride and admitted temporal incapacity to be the only author of our film. I acknowledged that one trimester would not be sufficient for obtaining the anthropological understanding of the relations established between locals and foreigners regarding their welcoming in the area, at least not to the extent that I considered sufficient for creating fiction. So, I asked locals who have experienced what it feels like to be in that field their whole lives to write a story containing all the elements that they judged necessary before I could start working on the film. This choice of waiting for the script to be finished before I started directing our film narrative had been planned by me.

It does not mean in any way that I have done so in a pure-hearted attempt to hand power to those whom I judged less capable of making films on their own, such as "enabling the indigenous peoples who had been the subjects of so many ethnographic films in the past to become the authors of their own films." (Henley, 2020) This kind of project tends to ignore the identity of filmmakers when they are part of indigenous groups while praising the anthropologists who "mercifully" lent them a camera. What I have done was more aligned with the use of my authority as a filmmaker and a researcher for strategizing in which manner that my inaptitude in territorial, cultural, and theatrical knowledge would not get in the way of making our film the best it could be.

Research Question #2: Why would fiction be a trustworthy element in ethnographies nowadays?

The second problem concerns the risk of using fiction to avoid my bias but ending up finding a group of people who present a version of reality that favors themselves, a debate that can be applied to anthropological films since their debut. Robert Flaherty has mostly made use of fiction in some enacted scenes to simply represent social situations that would otherwise require a long wait until they occurred spontaneously in front of his camera. However, *Nanook of the North* presented some less-dignifying scenes, such as when Flaherty asked the main actor to bite a vinyl record so that he would look ingeniously childish, corroborating Jacques Rousseau's illuminist theory of a *noble savage* and making the film more appealing to occidental audiences.

In the case of *Camerwood*, the name given to the theater club presided by Lawan, my concern about the legitimacy of the story they would create was settled due to their past theatrical experience. Since Lawan became president of that club, they have presented in festivals numerous plays whose

scripts concerned different social issues, as he describes to me in our first conversation: "In the theater, we have fought against corruption, against bribery, against nepotism, against how women are treated in society, juvenile delinquency, drug addiction..." I was very fortunate to find a group of people who were already used to writing stories that were in the same category of our topic (immigration) and that had even been awarded prizes for them.

Lawan holding his trophy at the Festival of Arts and Culture in Yaoundé, between the vice-rector and a supervisor.

The will of creating unbiased stories was also shared by the Camerwood cast. Their stories are recognized by people inside and outside academia as being able to really reflect what life is like in that place, feedback that I have also received from other Cameroonians after watching our film. Working with an established theater group provides certain credibility to the stories presented, be it an amateur or a professional group such as the one appearing in *Stageshakers!*, the companion work of Kwame Braun and Catherine M. Cole to Ghana's Concert Party Theater. The last section, called *Concert Tonight!*, contains narrated and summarized samples of some theater plays, presenting their perspectives while also giving publicity to their style of a theater play and advertising the group.

> ...Braun developed a collaborative relationship with his video subjects, this time members of a Ghanaian theatre company. He made a deal with the company to produce a series of commercial videos that they would sell in local villages. In return, they allowed him to travel with, and make his own documentary about, the group. This example demonstrates how the subjects of video may appropriate a video maker and his technology for their own ends. (Pink, 2001)

Research Question #3: How can I claim to have authorship of a film that was not written by me?

My last big concern before meeting Lawan was the fact that any theater group that I met would already have their own director, maybe not for video projects but certainly somebody the actors would look up to as their authority in the process, not me. If I were not able to take over the project after the script was done, I would only be the cameraman who is also following directions of somebody else as my leader. Moreover, I wondered how I could consider myself an ethnographer in that given moment if an ethnography demands first and foremost to have ethnographic relevance found by the researcher and not written by somebody else. My attempt to collaborate in equal terms to reduce my authorship in favor of enhancing theirs could maybe turn against me, inverting the patronized view about the locals that I criticize to an annulment of my own credentials, which would be equally undesirable.

The first method used to establish a collaboration in equal terms was by working with people who were as close as possible to me regarding career status. I believe it was much easier for me to form a contract of virtual sharedness with university students than if I had looked after uninstructed people to appear in my film. The combination of our voices was able to result in a product that is influenced by our <u>academic experience</u> as researchers. My etic perspective had to come to terms with their emic one to produce ethnographic content inside the fiction. However, by working with locals who are part of academia themselves, regardless of being students of Anthropology or any other Social Science, the ideas that first came from them before my intervention already had the kind of content that I needed, accelerating the process. We could say that they had the outsider and insider voices already in themselves.

> Myerhoff proposed that the researcher/filmmaker seek to locate a *third voice*—an amalgam of the maker's voice and the voice of the subject, blended in such a manner as to make it impossible to discern which voice dominates the work. In other words, make films where outsider and insider visions coalesce into a new perspective. Rouch's *Jaguar* appears to be the sole documentary experiment in third voice. (Ruby, 2000)

The second condition for equalizing us was that the financial outcome of our film was to be shared. From my first conversation with Lawan, before I met the other members of the club and started our script meetings, I made it clear that all the profit that our film could make in the future would be distributed among all of us. This is helpful to place locals and ethnographers on the same social level during the making of the film, as well as to reduce the chances of not finding actors who agreed to do it in such a short period. I have not paid them to do the films, but it never occurred to me either that its possible dividends would belong to me only. This, among many others, was a piece of thought I unconsciously shared with Rouch.

> Rouch always contractually established that he and his Nigerien friends would share equally the revenues. Regarding the anthropological films, Rouch paid his co-workers personally, but where the fiction films were concerned, everybody took part without pay in making the film and shared equally the money it brought in. (...) Even for the films that had real producers, like *Petit à Petit* or *Madame l'Eau*, Rouch stipulated equal earnings for his Nigerien friends and himself. (Bregstein, 2007)

The final method that I applied to my use of the camera during fieldwork was the aforementioned recording of how our fictional film was made behind-the-scenes, starting from my first talk with Lawan. At first, this served as a backup plan in case my project was not admitted by the university standards for student films, but it was also a safety net in case I lost so much of my authorship in the process that A) the project could not be called mine; B) I was not able to apply in the field any of the preparatory knowledge from my Visual Anthropology classes; or, worst-case scenario, C) I did not learn anything new from my fieldwork experience. It seemed necessary to make a second film as a making-of in addition to the fictional one I was creating with them.

OUR COLLABORATIVE FILM VS. MY MASTER'S FILM

The hardest part in this experimental direction that I took to my project was to make clear to external audiences the distinction applied to the two films that I was making, as I have perceived after coming back from the field and trying to present my ideas. During my rough-cut screenings, spectators kept expressing confusion between the two films, especially because they were both recorded in the same time period, in the same location, and portraying the same people in them. I was sometimes advised to include scenes from one film in the other, which was not possible since I had to respect my social contract with the theater club by preserving the script that they had written.

Our collaborative film is called *Accueil* and was an attempt to share authorship with the locals for creating and dramatizing a fictional narrative of ethnographic content. Since *Accueil* does not belong to me only, it cannot be used as the film associated with this master's thesis. Those who want to watch *Accueil* can find the link in the References section of this academic paper. **My master's film** is its making-of, called *Accueil: Behind-the-stories*.

	Our collaborative film	**My master's film**
Title	*Accueil*	*Accueil: Behind-the-stories*
Category	Fiction	Making-of
Model	Collaborative	Observational
Directed by	Lawan Pascal and R.D. Butinhão	R.D. Butinhão
Story by	The Camerwood cast	—

Accueil: Behind-the-stories relied on filming everything that happened behind the scenes from the very beginning of my stay in Ngaoundéré. Since we were already working together on a video project, the theater group did not oppose being filmed for extra content, and so the negotiation process for having people appearing in one's ethnographic film was made easier. Moreover, I wanted to

explore what a non-fictional ethnography would resemble even though I was making a fictional film, and so the making-of turned out to be the best opportunity. This type of film, which has even had their own exclusive festivals in the past, are often presented as extras to the main film, as in the case of Nick Broomfield's *Ghosts*. "The extent of prior research conducted is made clearly evident in the featurette, 'The making of *Ghosts*', which accompanies the film itself on the DVD." (Mathew, 2014)

Not every scene in *Accueil: Behind-the-stories* is observational, though. Some fictional segments from *Accueil* appear in it to contextualize or wrap up all the behind-the-scenes footage. These scenes received a tint of pink when presented in *Accueil: Behind-the-stories* to make them more easily distinguished. Additionally, we asked Lawan's family to perform the sequence that starts and ends the film as they did when he was a child. It is included there to explain the presence of fiction in the local cultures and was filmed with his family telling stories around the fire in Mbé, his homeplace, to where we traveled a couple of weeks before my return to Norway. It is worth noting that the storyboard that I had sketched with Lawan by my side was made weeks before I met his family or his homeplace, but his description of this event was so vivid that I was able to predict the exact shots that I would later be able to film despite not having asked his family to place themselves in any particular way that favored the camera.
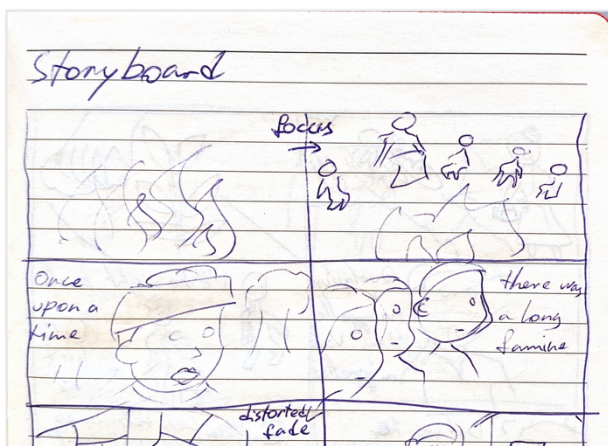
The storyboard sketched at the beginning of June 2019 and the scenes recorded by the end of that month.

II. THEORETICAL APPROACH

THEME 2: FICTION

My motivation for becoming a filmmaker comes from an interest in directing people for video since I was a child. Even during television adverts, I used to find myself imagining how actors should be holding their products in commercial films so that the labels would be more favored to the camera or what kind of framing would make the message better delivered to customers. To work in Advertising, I started a bachelor's in Social Communication, during which I had the Filmmaking content that I was looking forward to having, but ended up discovering in our Anthropology classes another field of study that I had never thought to be inspiring for my career. During our whole sophomore year, we were introduced to the work of Lévi-Strauss, to examples of how our perspectives on life are influenced by the location we reside in, and to anthropologists who eventually visited and fascinated us with their lectures.

Meanwhile, I was still following my wish to be a director by practicing it in some amateur plays or video projects for my major. When it was time to advance in my studies, I could not decide between applying either to a master's program related to Anthropology or to one that focused on Filmmaking and media. I, fortunately, found this course in Visual Anthropology that combined both of my interests. However, my knowledge about how films were used in Anthropology was incompatible with the kind of direction with which I wanted to work. Since I intended to depict narratives of which I had control, being allowed to manipulate its content so that it would be more captivating to the audience, I could not see myself at the time making films that did not involve fiction.

Even if I were to make *documentaries*, films that can rely on heavy editing to *tell* a story creatively, it would still not be the career that I pursued. It was even more inconceivable to see myself making *ethnographic films*, which are often used to complement an ethnography through elements such as visual exemplification and sensual portrait, mostly receiving fewer alterations of content and chronology. Their work is more related to actively attempt to *find* a story during their fieldwork instead of telling it. (Crawford, 1992) All things considered, my interest in Anthropology still made me apply for this master's program despite the lack of enacted content. I found it advantageous to develop the advanced skills required to make ethnographic films. If I were able to capture sound and image without any previous arrangement with the people, setting, and weather that appeared in my footage, I would definitely have enough knowledge to deal with adversities in my future fictional works.

As I was investigating the topic to write my motivation letter in the application process, I started learning about the presence of fiction in ethnographies. I came across anthropological films that had artists as their protagonists and naturally had a tendency of including narratives created by their

characters. This was the case in Catarina Alves Costa's *Mais Alma* (2001) that, despite not being a fictional film, captivated me in its first scene by having the declamation of a poem to the camera. My eyes were finally opened to the actual possibility of including fiction in my ethnography when I was introduced to the work of Jean Rouch. His process of 'ethnofiction' was included between my motivations in the application letter for this program and then kept it on the back burner until I was sure that I could implement a similar project in my fieldwork.

After finishing my fieldwork and the films I made from it, I came to realize that my interests in making fiction films and in anthropological work were not distinct, but complementary. The basic structure of a typical heroic journey that is used in fictional narratives dates back from millennia ago. In a summary, heroes leave their walled cities where they know that there is order and safety so that they can explore the chaotic unknown, where they slay the dragon and bring the treasures it guards back to their homeplaces.

As I listened to the life stories of anthropologists during my bachelor's program, such adventures started sounding like real possibilities to me. Ethnographers leave the comfort of their homes to discover new worlds and surpass adversities to bring knowledge back to the safe walls of their universities. In my case, both the place that I was visiting and the one to where I returned after my fieldwork were unexplored territories, as if my whole master's program was an adventure through the chaotic unknown.

CREATION MYTHS

TERRITORIES AND ARCHETYPES

In the beginning, our divine creator lived up above. One of his creations rebelled against the universal order he had established. The order was restored through the sacrifice of another one of his progenies. This is a summary of the creation mythology of the Dogon people, in Mali. They were studied by Germaine Dieterlen and Marcel Griaule, who "became concerned to demonstrate that African mythology and cosmogony could be as complex as that of ancient Greece." (Henley, 2009) Despite Griaule's questionable approaches to the Dogon people and the legitimacy of the information that he claims to have extracted from them, a universal trend in creation myths can be noted in his writings. In fact, almost every religious narrative depicts the origin of the world in a very similar way, mostly varying about the moral dilemmas and anomalies that appear in each narrative.

A comprehensible way of describing these creation myths demands at first separation of what we understand as *the world* into two different perspectives. The first one is the **explored territory**, the objective denotative world which can be perceived as a place of things where we analyze the *quid* (what?). In this world of objects, we can find *what is* out there using our primary senses and we

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measure it through formal methods of science. It is worth noting that it was not until recently that metaphysical phenomena and alchemical theories started to be considered "anti-scientific". Much of our present knowledge of Chemistry and Healthcare has its origins in the study of alchemists and healers. In contemporaneity, every scientific movement demands to be inherently based on what can be proven, referring to the material world.

The other perspective refers to the **unexplored territory**, the connotative world of values, emphasizing the *quare* (why?). *What is and what should be* are portrayed through critical-philosophical perspectives in a forum for action. This world of actions is used by us in our everyday life to discover the meaning behind what exists in the world and has been the venue where techniques of narrative operate, such as myth, literature, and drama. Inside these narratives, the distinction between the mysteries of the **unexplored territory**, the certainty of the **explored territory**, and our presence as **heroes** who try to mediate knowledge from both worlds is represented through three archetypes[6]: **Chaos**—a chaotic natural environment providing all threats and possibilities to human life; **Order**—ordered protection over accumulated cultural knowledge; and the **Logos**[7]—the people whose conscious mind leads them to take risks to explore the world so that their sacrifice brings balance between order and chaos.

> First is unexplored territory—the Great Mother, nature, creative and destructive, source and final resting place of all determinate things. Second is explored territory—the Great Father, culture, protective and tyrannical, cumulative ancestral wisdom. Third is the process that mediates between unexplored and explored territory—the Divine Son, the archetypal individual, creative exploratory Word and vengeful adversary. We are adapted to this world of divine characters, much as to the objective world. The fact of this adaptation implies that the environment is in "reality" a forum for action, as well as a place of things. (Peterson, 1999)

For the Dogon people, these archetypes are represented by the cult of the Binu (*logos*), whose temples have appeared in the world after being sacrificed by the sky god Amma (order) so that Order was restored after the rebellion of another Nommo, the Pale Fox (chaos). "The kick that they give [in their dances] is kicking the Fox. Because for order to exist, disorder is necessary; that's the Fox, master of disorder." (Rouch, 2003) The same is true for numerous other myths around the world, such as the Egyptians that had chaos, order, and logos represented by Set, the usurper that killed his brother Osiris, resurrected to give birth to the heroic Horus.

The Mesopotamians believed that Language was established when the young god Marduk (*logos*) emerged up the holy dominance hierarchy by shredding the saltwater dragon[8] Tiamat (chaos)

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[6] I use 'archetype' for figures whose definitions are applied to multiple agents and scenarios known by the human experience in varying degrees, regardless of the different applications to which it might be adapted in each narrative.
[7] The Greek word *logos*, often translated as 'word' or 'study', would be used in the past to call what nowadays we refer to as 'consciousness' given the idea that, by professing our will to the world, we exist in it as a conscious mind.
[8] The common presence of dragons in myths possibly derives from our cognitive mechanisms for identifying predators, hence its junction of characteristics from the animals that endangered our species throughout evolution, such as the snake

who had turned into the Chaos of the Universe after the murder of her consort, the freshwater Abzu (order). This myth was filled with learnings and values that were important to be applied to their physical world for the safety and longevity of their people, so they came up with the New Year's festival that is still celebrated nowadays in most cultures.

To keep his sovereignty, the king had to prove his worth as a keeper of Order by acting out Marduk's quest, going out of safety for cutting Chaos into pieces. Given that the walled city in which they resided represented the known territory while the outside world was unpredictable, he was stripped of his royal garments and taken outside the city to be humiliated until he confessed his failures as a ruler. After that dramatization was sufficiently acknowledged in his mind, they would use statues to reproduce the battle of Marduk and Tiamat. (Eliade, 1978) Similar to how all non-dictatorial chiefs of State must abide by the law of their countries, this ritual reminded the king and the people that not even the ruler of a nation can be omnipotent.

By acting out these narratives, these principles could more effectively be passed on to the next generation, to make sure that Order would be prepared for any Chaos that might come. The Dogon people also perform their equivalent ceremony, the Sigui, but instead of having their ritual on an annual basis, they do it every sixty years to ensure that every new generation receives the message.

> It is the length of a human lifetime. What we have just seen in the transition from one 'century' to another, the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another, every sixty years. And being sure that there will be survivors, we are sure that the knowledge of this new generation will be passed on to the next, and so on until the end of the world. The adventure of a village community; all the males from age two to age fifty-nine all dressed alike, all drinking beer, and so on. (Rouch, 2003)

THE HERO WITHIN US

The formulation of mythical heroes (*logos*) has been interpreted by Mircea Eliade as the sum of successful human behavior over time being collected in a dramatized narrative. Any human activity, such as hunting or sowing, has been improved through trial and error. The cumulative data on these processes ought to be condensed in a way that people would be able to remember them, avoid to repeat past mistakes, and act as descendants honoring the triumphs of the heroes of the past, "ancestors of consanguineous groups and are the 'prototypical representatives' of certain fundamental human activities." (Eliade, 1978) This is the story of virtually every archetypal hero who is called to explore the deadly dangers of the unknown to maintain order in his homeplace. "The symbolic story of the beginning, which speaks to us from the mythology of all ages, is the attempt made by man's childlike,

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that often represents mythical Chaos. An essential part of the hero's journey is the treasure or improvement received after slaying the dragon, which was converted into the reward system used in video games, another medium that attracts audiences for mixing human creativity and our urge for adventures in a relatively stable world.

prescientific consciousness to master problems and enigmas which are mostly beyond the grasp of even our developed modern consciousness." (Neumann, 1954)

From the Jungian perspective, these heroic narratives are the journeys within each of us. "The story of the hero, as set forth in the myths, is the history of this self-emancipation of the ego, struggling to free itself from the power of the unconscious and to hold its own against overwhelming odds." (Neumann, 1954) In Taoism it is believed that every being is formed by Chaos and Order, oscillating in between on different levels of analysis. Amadou Hampaté Bâ defines characters in tales, both the good and the bad ones, as "two opposite poles within us ... Our being is the site of their combat ... It is within us, and not in external social categories, that one needs to look for the character's similarities, qualities and faults". (*in* Thackway, 2003)

When analyzing our cerebral hemispheres, we can verify that each one plays a role so that the brain can be capable of conceptualizing reality. The right hemisphere of our brains is responsible for loading the multiple possible forms of abstraction in which the undiscovered chaotic reality might present itself. Meanwhile, the left one looks for translating these countless variables into a message that allows us to orderly understand the world around us. Both perspectives are inside every one of us and our cognitive system requires a balance between them for preparing us for life.

> It is the right hemisphere, which is activated by the unknown, and which can generate patterns rapidly, that provides the initial imagery—the contents of fantasy—for the story. It is the left hemisphere that gives these patterns structure and communicability (as it does, for example, when it interprets a painting, a novel, a drama or a conversation). (Peterson, 1999)

The archetypical characters in the heroic narratives represent the conflicts we all have between our own vices and also our opposing virtues, such as beauty, truth, and kindness, only recognized by us as such because of our moral imagination according to Russel Kirk. This self-knowledge can be used in various ways. For Eric Voegelin, the importance of founding myths lies in constituting a nation that can repel others, such as happened with the Greeks, Romans, and Mongols. Another use is proposed by Frantz Fanon, to whom "the biggest fight of every oppressed people or of a demographic group in a racist world is to control the knowledge of their own collective past and of their own identity." (Convents, 2003)

Moreover, the most important use of a shared belief system is to make the world intelligible to one another. To present propositional beliefs and attitudes to the next generation, the human brain finds it easier to index and recall them in the shape of a story. "By storing information about the problems of others, even if they are fictional characters, we can learn from their actions. When our own circumstances match those of people we have heard about, we can conclude that we need to modify our behavior so as to learn from the commonality of experience." (Schank, 1990)

THE SEMIOLOGY OF FICTION

HYPERREALITY VS. POST-TRUTH

Our belief in the actual existence of the individuals who have inspired the stories that shape our character is irrelevant to the message to which this collection of individuals has contributed. "Our discourse necessarily brings us to Christ, because he is the still living myth of our culture. He is our culture hero, who, *regardless of his historical existence*, embodies the myth of the divine Primordial Man, the mystic Adam." (Jung, 1959; my emphasis) The classical fictional stories are the ones that resist the trial of time and are still told nowadays due to their capacity to dramatize reality in a compressed manner that attracts audiences into visualizing themselves as participants in those dramas, regardless of their connection or disconnection to the objective world.

> There are forms of fiction that are meta-true, (...) they're more real than reality itself because they abstract out the most relevant elements of reality and present them to you, that's why you watch fiction. You want it boiled down to the essence, that's what makes good fiction, and that essence is truer than plain old truth if it is handled well. Half a lifetime of events can go by in a Shakespeare play and it covers a wide range of scenes. It is cut and edited and compressed all at once but, because of that, it blasts you with a kind of emotional and ethical force that *just the mere videotaping of someone's daily life* wouldn't even come close to approximating. (Peterson, 2017; my emphasis)

The reality in the **explored territory** world manifests itself in academic studies since the introduction of plain style mode of writing in the 18th century to convey information in the models of natural sciences: all facts and no emotion. This powerful mode of constructing reality has focused on the presentation of data analysis, testing, hypotheses, and scientific methods. In the **unexplored territory** world, on the other hand, it is described by James Bruner as the narrative construction of reality, the transfer of knowledge, and wisdom of the sages to the next generation through stories.

> As I have argued extensively elsewhere, we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative—stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on. Narrative is a conventional form, transmitted culturally and constrained by each individual's level of mastery and by his conglomerate of prosthetic devices, colleagues, and mentors. Unlike the constructions generated by logical and scientific procedures that can be weeded out by falsification, narrative constructions can only achieve "verisimilitude." Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and "narrative necessity" rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness, although ironically we have no compunction about calling stories true or false. (Bruner, 1991)

It should be noted that the use of values from fiction to document or understand real facts must not be confused with the postmodern idea of 'post-truth'. Bruno Latour questioned the "hypocritical quest for rational truth", which he sees as all human-oriented through scientific manipulation of the truth before becoming a scientific fact. "During the process of arguing over uncertain data, scientists foregrounded the reality that they were, in some essential sense, always speaking *for* the facts; and yet, as soon as their propositions were turned into indisputable statements and peer-reviewed papers—what Latour called ready-made science—they claimed that such facts had always spoken for themselves." (Kofman, 2018)

Foucault not only accepted the concept of a post-truth born new by the day as more relevant than the truth that is collectively signified by society but also believed in enabling people to subvert reality. "Truth is not acquired through a kind of continuous and cumulative creation, but rather through a set of grids stacked on top of each other, which leak old and collect new knowledge." (Chomsky and Foucault, 1971) In the regime of truth, the effectiveness of discourse and the knowledge that it produces is more important than the factual truth, acknowledging a public and social character of the language.

Contrary to that vision, the objective truth still exists in our explored territory, but neither the fact is superior to the value nor vice-versa, instead, they coexist. However, in an attempt to understand the multitude of meanings that each cultural group might attribute to the same given sign, students of Semiotics have erroneously opposed the prevalence that the 'signifier' has in the very foundation of the material world and drove their interpretative pendulum entirely towards highlighting the other constituent of reality, the 'signified' that is sprouted in the creation of narratives in the unexplored territory.

> "Peirce goes very far in the direction that I have called the deconstruction of the transcendental signified, which, at one time or another, would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign. I have identified logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence as the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire for such a signified." (Derrida, 1974)

The countless concepts that can be applied to a sign, however, do not imply that there is not a factual concept. There is a true meaning to be found through extensive investigation in which the *logos*, the conscious mind, looks for the perspective of the object that can be traced back to its origins and that conflicts in the smallest number of ways with other interpretations. The magnificence of a given truth is its presence in myths, timeless ontologies of the human archetype, while still grounded on factual information, making a value more real than what we understand as real, therefore **hyperreal**.

> By what is man led and guided in his search for meaning? The answer is by his conscience. Conscience may be defined as a means to discover meanings, to "sniff them out," as it were. Conscience lets man arrive at the unique meanings dormant in all the unique situations that go to make up a man's life. But it can also lead him astray. Conscience may err, so that man may not know for certain whether his conscience is right and another man's conscience that tells him something else is wrong or whether the reverse is true. Not that there is no truth; there is. But no one can be absolutely sure that he has arrived at the truth. Meaning must be found; it cannot be given. And it must be found by oneself, by one's own conscience. To give meanings would amount to moralizing. But if morals are to survive, they have to be ontologized. My response was that values cannot be taught, values must be lived. We cannot give meaning to our students. The only thing we can give to our students is the personal example of our own commitment to the cause of truth or research. (Frankl, 2010)

Instead of deconstructing what cannot be easily assimilated, the constructionist approach is an interesting way of facing our difficulty to understand the chaotic world of values without surrendering to the postmodern abdication of objective truth. The scientists use orderly patterns, measurements, and cumulative knowledge of the explored territory in the material world. The constructivists, in turn, act by aiming at the unexplored territory of values, symbols, and narratives.

Things don't *mean*: we construct meaning, using representational systems — concepts and signs. Hence it is called the constructivist or **constructionist approach** to meaning in language. According to this approach, we must not confuse the *material* world, where things and people exist, and the *symbolic* practices and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate. Constructivists do not deny the existence of the material world. However, it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts. It is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others. (Hall, 1997)

This kind of lucid detachment from the objective world is what makes it possible for fictional stories to teach on the essence of societies using either human or non-human characters. For instance, the Songhai people use the structure of lion groups to understand how the first communities of people were schematized. While the mother lioness does all the chores, the father lion is a polygynous chief who protects his territory by fighting other males, including his own son, who then has to leave with his twin sister to start a new community. If the son manages to kill his old father, he becomes the chief. It is suggested "in the origin myth only that the Gow [lion hunters] may be illegitimate sons" and that "the men that kill lions lose their sons". (Rouch, 2003)

Stories with personified animals are especially interesting for children, whose natural behavior is this ability to interpret the world without a scientific proof (explored territory). Chesterton (1908) assigns the dependency on factual information of adults as being more primitive than the children's ability to abstract (unexplored territory), whose faith would be a symbol of superiority. From an early age, we are already able to perform and act out certain agencies, preparing ourselves for the adventures of our lives, including life as an adventure on its own. Erving Goffman (1956) suggests in his performance theory that "life itself is a dramatically enacted thing", so, in a way, we are always acting.

THEATER PLAY

Even as adults we often find ourselves using performance as a way to conceptualize an unknown social situation, such as preparing for an important event by simulating how we should behave in that particular place. In the spectrum of reality and contrivance, a real or a false performance does not matter to the performer, since what is true is not essentially connected to reality, but still relevant to our assimilation of it. The interpretation of fictional stories through acting helps both the performers and the spectators that learn about reality from it.

Socrates understood that *knowledge* was in the same level of *remembering* since people need to have somehow registered a situation in their memories before being skilled enough to claim to know it. Theater play is a mechanism for humans to be able to conceptualize aspects of our everyday life, described by Plato as mimesis of reality. From age seven to ten/eleven is the period when children start introducing real dramatization in their playtime. It is first improvised, but they later distribute roles and simulate situations they had seen and look forward to being prepared for in the future. According

to Aristoteles theater play also has an important cathartic function for preventing certain behaviors. "A 'catharsis' which not only eliminates dangerous tendencies but makes them acceptable through canalization and sublimation." (Piaget, 1951)

Before toddlers are even able to conceptualize fiction, they are already capable of representing actions they have seen or have been taught to do. For example, when they see a pillow and automatically lie down on it but get up one second later without actually wanting to go to sleep. Jean Piaget (1951) describes it as a "ludic ritualization of schemas", signs that are "not yet properly symbolic, since the action is only a reproduction of itself and is therefore still both signifier and signified." I will now explain this concept through a simple game: playing doctor.

Let us consider that a young girl has observed a doctor placing a stethoscope on the chest of her mother or her own and is capable of repeating the movement. This automatic action in itself does not necessarily mean the child is conducting an exam, neither in the actual state of being a doctor, which is impossible for a child, nor as an imaginary symbolism of what a doctor does. The sign of this simple movement would have both its physical existence (signifier) and its mental concept (signified) as one thing that is hard to distinguish, i.e. position of arm and contact to the chest. These by themselves are simply an imitation, incapable of achieving the imaginary symbolism of a physician's practice. I represent it here by using the Barthesian triangles.
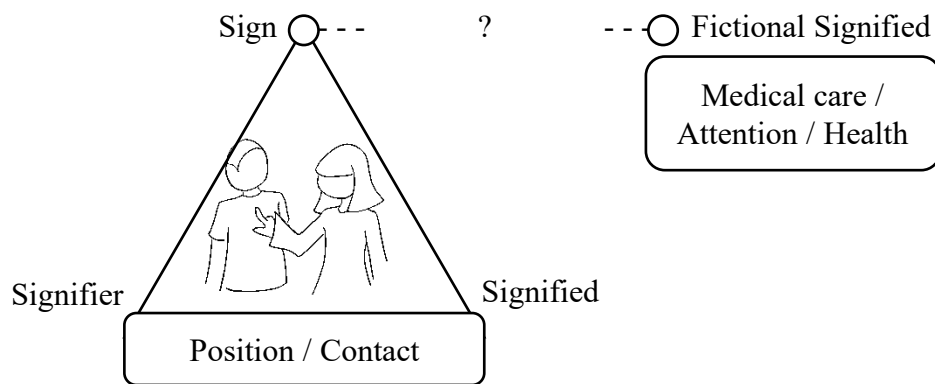
Denotative semiotic triangle of playing doctor.

"A child of seven is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door and saw a dragon. But a child of three is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door. Boys like romantic tales; but babies like realistic tales—because they find them romantic." (Chesterton, 1908) However, once children grow up and start to execute the action for fun and it does not finish upon its completion, the distinctions start to appear between the signifier (position and contact) that can now connect itself to a "whole schema as it would develop if completed 'seriously'" (Piaget, 1951), thus becoming a real doctor during the playtime through their 'make-believe' (unexplored territory).
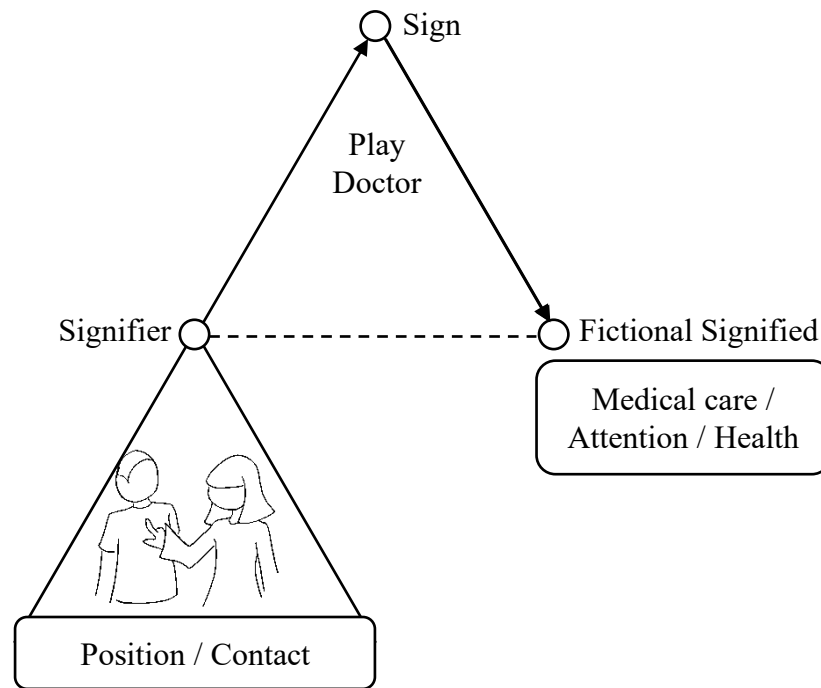
Denotative and connotative semiotic triangles of playing doctor.

These games are only considered to be fun if no specific child is directing or overcontrolling its rules. Actually, when asked separately, each participant will describe these rules in their own way. That is because the instinct of representing fictional roles is inside our mechanism of readiness for adversities. Therefore, unexpectedness is required for the game to make sense to be played. For example, the game of ball is only fun to play given the instability of a sphere on a flat surface and its not-so-predictable trajectories. During their playtime, children lose control of the collaborative imaginative space and simply put themselves in a state of mind that is half themselves and half the role they are playing, which could be described as the *persona* of a doctor, in this example.

STORYTELLING

The process of associating a superior meaning to apparently meaningless actions is similar to the model through which *stories* are elevated to *myths*. "Semiology has taught us that myth has the task of giving a historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal." (Barthes, 1972) Let us take into consideration the story that starts *Accueil: Behind-the-stories*. Around the fire, Lawan's mother tells her family the story of a rabbit who had two wives, a guineafowl and a partridge. He fakes his death by diving into the river and releasing *ké'ed*, a red powder very used among the Dii people, mixed to egg white to resemble blood coming from underwater. The partridge felt desolate and cried for her dead husband while the guineafowl was sadder about having to shave

her head, now that she had become a widow. In the end, the rabbit sends the guineafowl away from his household and keeps the partridge who really loved him.
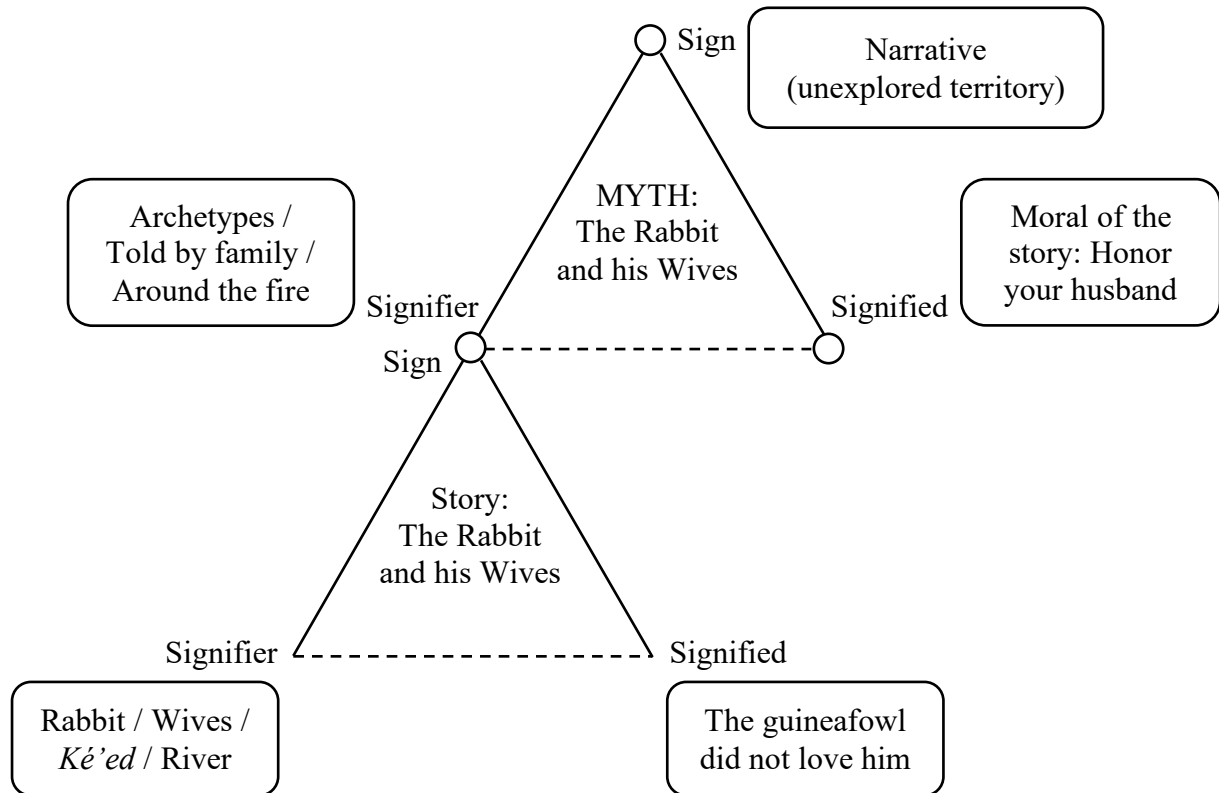
Mythical semiotic triangles of The Rabbit and his Wives.

In this case, the original sign (the story) is already complete with its signifier (elements of the story, characters, location) distinguished from its signified (the guineafowl cared more about her appearance than for her late husband). Moreover, in order to be told generation after generation, the story must also have a reason to be important, an everlasting lesson to be learned. In this context, the narrative (sign) uses animals which are known in African stories for each representing a different archetype, impacting children by the fantasy of speaking animals, added to the setting of the whole family around the fire listening to their grandmother (signifier). The mythical signified in this last scenario is the moral of the story, with its mythical properties of promoting values to future generations based on cumulative cultural knowledge (Order).

The stories that were told around that fireplace promoting valuable learnings for those children are what other nations would call 'fairy tales'. These stories are not dependent on the scientific confirmation, for the child can accept the "laws of Elfland", as Chesterton puts it.

> ...I deal here with what ethic and philosophy come from being fed on fairy tales. If I were describing them in detail, I could note many noble and healthy principles that arise from them. There is the chivalrous lesson of "Jack the Giant Killer"; that giants should be killed because they are gigantic. It is a manly mutiny against pride as such.

(...) There is the lesson of "Cinderella," which is the same as that of the Magnificat—*exaltavit humiles*[9]. There is the great lesson of "Beauty and the Beast"; that a thing must be loved *before* it is loveable. There is the terrible allegory of the "Sleeping Beauty," which tells how the human creature was blessed with all birthday gifts yet cursed with death; and how death also may perhaps be softened to a sleep. (Chesterton, 1908)

The oral nature of transmitting these moral lessons is very present in various other art forms in the African continent, despite it also being the home continent of the traditional written form of Egyptian hieroglyphs. This especially sub-Saharan oral tradition comes alive through stories and songs but also very often as proverbs, which Isidore Okpewho describes as a storehouse of wisdom with philosophical depth after *time has tested the truth* in the observation and experience of humans in the surrounding nature. (Okpewho *in* Thackway, 2003) For Amadou Hampaté Bâ these oral narratives are a mix of religion and recreation with school disciplines, such as history, natural science, and craftsmanship.

> Through tales and myths, children learn the organizational structures and moral codes regulating their society and encounter their ancestral history and the belief systems of their community. Epic tales of past heroes, which the narrator often directly relates to present-day events, help to convey a sense of pride and belonging to a given community, setting accepted behavioral patterns and reinforcing social cohesion. (...) Such tales reinforce the *moral order*, with villains being punished and conflicts resolved. (Bâ *in* Thackway, 2003; my emphasis)

Orality is possibly the main difference between African and European fairy tales. While both are vectors for the transmission of social codes, the oral storyteller is required to bring the story to life by engaging the audience. Since "the African Tales and Legends particularly please our Children." (Vallerey, 1955), the oral tradition, which cannot rely on beautiful drawings, focuses on performance to be attractive to the new generations. "The successful reception of the narrative will depend on the narrator's performance skills, particularly as audiences in Africa will often be familiar with the narrative or its stock characters and situations. Tales are judged for their perspicacity and delivery, rather than for their originality..." (Thackway, 2003)

The masters of speech responsible for maintaining this oral tradition in the sub-Saharan territory are known as 'griots', a name without etymological consensus itself. Despite being known by different names depending on location, educational background, and social role, these bards act as "highly respected mediators, advisors, spokesmen-cum-ambassadors (...) genealogists, historians, poets, singers, musicians and storytellers responsible for safeguarding and transmitting popular memory". (Thackway, 2003) "The griot is also the custodian of a society's traditions, the one who maintains and reinforces the links between present and past." (Stoller, 1992) Given this strong oral presence, other African art forms naturally derived from these tales.

> The transmission of learning via a system of codified tales, myths, legends, riddles and proverbs ... explains the extensive influence [that orature] has on more recent cultural forms, such as literature, theatre, and cinema. (...)

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[9] Translates to *hath exalted the humble and meek*.

Thematic studies of Francophone African film frequently points to the parallel between the themes and archetypal characters found in both the oral tales and films. (...) African audiences familiar with such tales since childhood will immediately recognize and interpret both the traits associated with these characters and the symbolism of given situations and themes. (Thackway, 2003)

FILM GRIOTS

AFRICAN FILMS

Influenced by the role of the griot and the themes and styles of oral tales, sub-Saharan Francophone African filmmakers give their audiovisual production the same importance for cultural, social, economic, and political development as the alphabetization had since the independence of Cameroon in 1960 for promoting their own literature and press after the decolonization. (Gullestad, 2007) Before then, Africans were "civilized" via imposed French cultural modes and norms. For instance, "the 1934 Laval Decree (...) stipulated that all film projects set in the French African colonies be submitted for prior approval..." (Thackway, 2003)

Video production and television would only start in Ngaoundéré two decades after independence. Prior to that, films were made in the area by Norwegian missionaries whose discourse focused on negative aspects, and which was later accused by anthropologists to show those people as if they were living in the Stone Age just so that the chances of receiving financial support for the mission were increased. This was the case in *Sinda: En virkelighetsskildring fra Kamerun*[10] (1961), made in 1960 to tell the story of a young girl who is forced to marry a polygamous old man, only to be saved by the missionaries. "It has been shown to the Norwegian children at the boarding school and to new missionaries, but not outside the Norwegian circles ... None of the people who acted in the film saw the finished result. It had not been made for them. Or, to put it more precisely, it was made to elicit money to help them." (Gullestad, 2007)

Many other international organizations, such as the UNESCO, many NGOs, and some television channels have made films in Africa. "At first sight, we might think this contributes, nevertheless, to maintain Africa present in the media. Unfortunately, most of these (...) often only exalt the presence and work of these institutions. Their perspective does not correspond to the reality of Africa as Africans see it." (Convents, 2003)

The consequence of this fetishized portrait of a poor and weak Africa results in less international power in economic relations and ends up perpetuating a colonialist view. "Forty years after the independence of most African countries, occidental audiovisual productions still transmit elements of the colonial culture. This reinforces racism, justifies exploitation of others (...). In certain

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[10] Translates as *Sinda: A depiction of reality from Cameroon*, by the Norwegian Missionary Company's Film Center.

countries, this has led to frustration and an anti-occidental attitude." (Convents, 2003) Even after Cameroonians started making films that had themselves as the intended audience, financial support still depended on European organisms. It was a dilemma between A) accepting money from government agencies and dealing with eventual censorship of its contents and B) receiving money from private institutions but adapting the film's content to become more profitable. (Gugler, 2003)

Over time, they were able to discover what kind of style suited the African audience that for the first time had a voice. Besides the archetypes from fictional myths, African films started "combining light-hearted comedy and social critique (...), 'serious' social issues, such as polygamy, prostitution, AIDS and immigration." (Thackway, 2003) For the Ivorian director Henri Duparc, caricature makes us looks at ourselves as we are and mend our ways, for humor is a strong weapon to pass forward ideas to reflect upon after the laughter. *Castigat ridendo mores*, customs are corrected through ridicule.

Taking the perspective of Africans into account is a determinant value to call a film African or not. Productions whose finances and technicians come from overseas have attempted to be included in this category simply due to having their settings and subjects taking place in that continent. However, some of them still present the "utterly euro-centric" "perspectives that have distorted Western appreciation of Africa and serve to highlight the distorted perspectives on Africa conveyed by the films Western audiences are most likely to see." (Gugler, 2003)

Even unintentionally, filmmakers run the risk of building a patronizing narrative by highlighting the challenges that Africans face and hiding their capacity to overcome them. Jean Rouch is the most-known filmmaker who has attempted "to break through the colonial relationship between 'rich whites' and 'poor blacks' and to arrive at a relationship based on equality (...). This is why the fiction films he made with them in Niger are in the end truly African films." (Bregstein, 2007)

In 2017 the VISCAM project was established as an educational program that allowed students from partner universities to travel abroad and produce ethnographic research with the use of a camera. As of now, it integrates the universities of Tromsø in Norway, Ngaoundéré and Maroua in Cameroon, and Bamako in Mali. This was the program that allowed me to meet, while still in Norway, the Cameroonian students who became my friends and helped me during my stay in Ngaoundéré, as well as arranged for me to receive the equipment, support, and grants that allowed my project to exist.

The VISCAM project is a successor to Ngaoundéré Anthropos, a similar program that ran in the region from 1992 to 2006, and that is still recognized as of great importance by the people with whom I performed my fieldwork, including Lawan. "The project involves several Norwegian and Cameroonian universities and aims to contribute to the development of knowledge in the northern areas of Cameroon, which is highly economic and social in high regard to the rest of the country." (Bull, 2009)

The Ngaoundéré Anthropos sign can still be found on the campus.

It aimed to enable Cameroonian students to portray their country as they see it and has since resulted in numerous Cameroonian filmmakers with critical and valid perspectives of their homeplace. During this period of cooperation, Lisbet Holtedahl filmed *Africa's Last Sultan*, a film from 1993 that changed the usual focus of films made in Africa for a wealthy person instead, given her predilection for studying center-peripheric relations. Both of the VISCAM and Ngaoundéré Anthropos projects were inspired by Jean Rouch's approach of collaboration in ethnographic filmmaking.

JEAN ROUCH

Having lived in Africa for 50 years, Jean Rouch was known for his creative and daring approaches to filmmaking. Instead of questioning why a film should be made in a certain way, his reasoning consisted of asking '*pourquoi pas?' (why not?).* How he included the group of communist Parisians as both participants and self-evaluators on camera for his *Chronique d'un Été* was also true for the films he made with Africans. "...He engaged them directly in the making of his films, thereby crossing the boundaries between European and African, filmmaker and subject, that no one had either thought to or had been able to do before." (Henley, 2009)

Rouch's scene that has struck me the most is from *Petit à petit,* in which an African man measures Parisians with the anthropometric tools used by Europeans on other peoples. A connection to factual behavior is secondary when we consider how much can be learned from a daring questioning enactment that twists our perspectives around. This film, along with *Cocorico Monsieur Poulet,* was "clearly inspired by the capricious, nonlinear structure of African tales or legends as recounted by griots in the oral tradition". (Bregstein, 2007) In his works, he demonstrates that the function of an

ethnographer is essentially the same as of wise elders of a village: "As a griot (bard), Jean Rouch had fulfilled his greatest responsibility: to pass on his knowledge to the next generation." (Stoller, 1992) In the conflict between life and death, anthropologists explore the representation of the latter by showing what our ancestors mean for our present life.

By prioritizing radically empirical experiences over explanatory theories, Rouch was able to let go of an overestimated higher knowledge and allowed many pages of his writing to be filled with peoples' own definitions of their religious concepts and commentary on myths and rituals, as it was the case with the Songhay people. "This textual strategy demonstrates Rouch's profound respect for Songhay ideas, practices, and wisdom, a respect that, when acknowledged by his Songhay hosts, led him deep into the often inexplicable worlds of Songhay sorcery and possession." (Stoller, 1992) The film Rouch made about the Gow was his own initiation as a lion hunter, a piece of information that was removed from his film by the American distributor but still present in the French version.

Rouch was not afraid of learning from the subjects of his films on the mistakes he had made. For instance, he had included a dramatic tune that was related to the hippopotamus hunt in *Bataille sur le Grand Fleuve*, but a local fisherman advised him of how unrelatable that was for them considering that these animals can hear very well underwater and absolute silence would have been the correct soundtrack for that scene. "I discovered that I had been a victim of Italian-style theater, with an orchestra in the pit. These people were right. They reasoned in their own thought system, and I, who was making a film about them, had no reason for imposing our system on them." (Rouch, 2003) This respectful perspective is part of the way Rouch formed his relationships with the people who have worked with him. While some have described his approach towards his film subjects as almost paternal, others have felt more like it was entomological. As a matter of fact, while Rouch contributed to their studies abroad and helped them escape from poverty, in return they provided him the necessary conditions to make his films possible to be made.

> Rouch got to know Damouré when, as a colonial engineer, he had to build roads in Niger with forced laborers in 1941 and 1942. They immediately became friends and from the very beginning Rouch distanced himself from the French colonial elite. (...) It was an equal relationship of give and take between them. Damouré did a lot for Rouch's anthropological work, as Rouch's other Nigerien friends did later on. They provided local inside information as well as their indispensable support in making his anthropological films. (Bregstein, 2007)

At the time his films were released, the name given to Rouch's unique kind of film language was 'shared cinema', a style in which "filmmakers refuse to hide their presence. (...) ...The context of filmmaking plays a central representational role. For Rouch the camera does not capture reality, it creates reality—or cine-reality—a set of images that evokes ideas and stimulates dialogue among observer, observed, and viewer." (Stoller, 1992) For Nigerien sociologist Michel Keita, Rouch's anthropological films were a form of 'anthropology shared' and his fiction films, a form of 'cinema shared'. (Bregstein, 2007)

Rouch was mentored by Griaule, an ethnographer that considered himself to be the "bloodhound of the social fact" under his colonial belief of intellectual inheritance. Assuming his informants obstructed his inquiries by hiding information, Griaule resourced to tricks, stratagems, and masks for circumventing their congenital mendacity, as if they were defendants in a court of law and the remainder of society were accomplices of the guilty party. "While Griaule thought of the ethnographic endeavor as a struggle to extract a nugget of truth from within a tangled skein of deceit in order to carry it off to Paris in triumph, Rouch's notion of exchange between subjects and researcher was based on the premise of collaboration in a joint creative project." (Henley, 2009)

THEME 3: COLLABORATION

Rouch never deemed his projects as a fully shared collaboration since the authorial contribution of his subjects was always framed and shaped under his authorship. He did not give control to the people in the film, although these were films "in which the subjects willingly participated and from which they apparently derived considerable pleasure." (Henley, 2009) On the other hand, their suggestions were often followed by him, which is not customary for movie directors. Rouch exercised his posture as an authority without letting go of his respect for individuals, acting as a real leader.

This was not the same kind of agreement that Rouch had when he co-directed *Chronique d'un Été* with Edgard Morin, to whom Rouch referred as "my collaborator" since they shared the authorship of their film. The word 'collaborator', meaning "one who works together", receives multiple interpretations depending on how ethnographers conceptualize the various kinds of work they have done, and how much they were attempting to work alongside their subjects or not. Some might define collaboration as an attitude to have, ambitioning some level of sharedness in the fieldwork. Others alert to avoid using the term simply as a political statement, but to make it an actual way of behaving.

Even though Jean Rouch was contrary both to the use of the term 'shared anthropology' and to the interpretation that that was how he behaved with his gang, some anthropologists were inspired by this widespread idea and felt the need to make their approaches as collaborative as possible. With special regard, Sarah Elder was able to completely let go of her authorship when willing to allow the people she filmed to make final decisions on her projects. "Collaborative filmmaking leads subjects to change the rules by which they will be filmed, as much as it changes the rules by which we film. Disenfranchised people (...) are mediating the film as much as the filmmaker mediates the subjects' representation in light of his/her own point of view." (Elder, 1995)

Elder believes collaboration lies in understanding the **creative space** that exists between the parts involved, resulting in films based on fairness, usefulness, and meaning with political and social relevance through deep involvement and a level of ethical accountability. For her, good documentary filmmaking happens with a clear contrast in the collaborative space between image makers and media subjects who are "different in cultural background or gender, social power, economics, language, filmmaking knowledge, etc." (Elder, 1995) Her collaboration is about filming the grounding of this relationship inside the symbiotic environment that she calls 'collaborative space'.

> With little regard for differing levels of control, the term collaboration has long served as a politically acceptable catch-all description of most joint efforts. In documentary the term is tossed around to mean anything from the subject as informant to the sharing of differing skills to the subject introducing the crew into a community to the subject as co-producer. The type of lateral collaboration I'm proposing creates an open space for dialogue: a space for filmmakers to learn to pose the questions they do not originally know to ask, a place where film subjects select

the fragments of their reality they deem significant to document, and a moral place where subjects and image makers can mediate their own representation. (Elder, 1995)

Elder does not ignore the components of traditional collaboration, though, as between co-directors or co-subjects who are together in the film, but she believes that that says way less about the ethnographic relevance of the documentary. The difference in her way of analyzing this power relationship is directing our criticism also to ourselves, researchers who allegedly have the best of intentions towards our subjects when including their points of view in the project, as I present in my Research Question #1. "One question I raise is this: is their power real power or is it a colonial hoax? Can the relationship be equal?" (Elder, 1995) A long time has passed until ethnographers started questioning whether their imperial gaze makes them believe that their civilization is modern whilst the traditional culture of the locals keeps them almost in the position of irrational beings.

> In this opposition lies the connection between the two contradictory usages: we are cultured and they are not *because* they live in a culture and we do not. Like works of art, their ways of life become objects of contemplation for us, but not *vice versa*, since we are the spectators in the gallery of human variety, whereas they are the figures in the pictures. In effect, the concept of culture operates as a distancing device, setting up a radical disjunction between ourselves, rational observers of the human condition, and those *other people*, enmeshed in their traditional patterns of belief and practice, whom we profess to observe and study. (Ingold, 1993)

Rouch declared that the most important for him in the release of *Moi, un Noir* "was that for the first time, an African spoke on film." (Rouch, 2003) His aforementioned anthropometry scene from *Petit à Petit* was released a couple of decades before Social Sciences recognized that some degree of authorship was inevitable to be shared with the subjects and started to accept innovations such as narrative, participatory filmmaking, and reflexivity as "...means to limit this asymmetrical interaction with 'the other' as well as to curb the subjective influence of the filmmaker (...). The concept of reflexivity relates to filmmakers making visible their methods and critically assessing their position within power structures such as social interactions with the 'other'." (Mathew, 2014)

Every ethnographic film can be placed in an axis between observational and authorial, depending on how many of the production decisions are taken either by the ethnographer or by the subject. "Even the simple decision as to when to turn the camera on or off (...), where to place the camera, how to frame a shot, who or what to film and how to film them, are all acts of authorship." (Henley, 2020) The editing process, usually done far from the field of research, can also have its authorship shared with the subject, such as in Trond Waage's *Struggle for a Living* (2002b). The sequence of photographs that appear throughout his photo-documentary was selected by filmmaker and informant together, who then became collaborators of the project.

JEAN ROUCH'S ETHNOFICTION

Looking back in time, the first ethnographies whose goal was to evoke how subjects visualized their own worlds were both coincidentally released in 1922 and have since become notorious in Anthropology. *Nanook of the North* by Robert Flaherty and *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* by Bronisław Malinowski managed to describe the public lives of their subjects while also celebrating first-hand details obtained from their extended immersion. However, in their depiction of reality, Malinowski and Flaherty would not refrain from inventing elements to include in their works to develop a determined ethnographic narrative.

> ...The structure of *Nanook* is made of up a series of everyday events that may not have happened exactly as shown in the film, not exactly in that order, but which could have happened in something approximating this manner. If one puts aside certain matters of content, such as the many ethnographic inaccuracies and comedic effects introduced to spice up the story for the popular audience, this form of fictional narrative is not dissimilar in formal terms to the narrative accounts one often encounters in ethnographic texts from *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* onwards, in which a typical routine is described as happening over a given length time, be it over a single day or a longer period. (Henley, 2020)

Another filmmaker from that moment in history who would also attempt to show truth with the inclusion of enacted elements was the Russian Dziga Vertov in his Kino-Pravda series. "Just when the first theoreticians of film tried to define this new 'language' in relation to fiction (coming directly from the theatrical tradition), Flaherty and Vertov turned their barely outlined rules upside down by experimenting with cinema in real life." (Rouch, 2003) It is suggested "that in making *Nanook of the North,* Robert Flaherty was the author, not of the first 'ethnographic documentary' as we would understand those terms today, but rather of the first 'ethnofiction'." (Henley, 2020)

'Ethnofiction' is the term that was later used to describe Rouch's dozen feature-length films, which were made following Flaherty's will to fictionalize accounts of his subjects' own everyday lives. Rouch described himself as a totemic descendant of Flaherty and appreciated his collaborative method of feedback screenings for sharing anthropology. Rouch's ethnofiction was made by having the subjects in his film improvise certain roles that they had established together to demonstrate certain characteristics of the place where the film was being recorded without depending on the actual events to coincidentally occur at the time of filming.

Flaherty's sentence "sometimes you have to lie, to tell the truth" goes along the lines of what thought Abbas Kiarostami, for whom nothing in cinema is real, it is all lies and fakery that suggests the truth. What cannot be forgotten is that the enacted content present in an 'ethnofiction' has the specific goal of emulating reality, even in the case of academic films. "Rouch's films were all based on ethnographic research to varying degrees, which was then represented through fictional narratives and often improvised performances." (Sjöberg, 2008b) Questions arising from whether the non-actors

in *Chronique d'un Été* were acting or not, if they were revealing genuine truths or had a phony naturalness seem more suitable to journalistic material than to the study of human beings.

Aside from the academic application of his knowledge, there is also an artistic intention in this form of film. Inspired by the "grace" found in the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, who spent nine years in Torino producing his metaphysical artworks simply because of one poetic sentence Nietzsche said about that city, Rouch has also dreamed of creating a modern myth with his films. "I would like to paint with movement, with color, moments like those that ask questions of the viewer and give no answer. It is up to them to find it, just as I found it when I was my own first viewer..." (Rouch, 2003)

To be able to touch human beings in such a way is no less valid than constructing narratives of presumed veracity but that cannot form an emotional connection with the viewer to transmit the sensation of life somewhere away, which is the main need for an ethnography to exist in its essence. Fictional stories can achieve a greater level of comprehension of reality by resourcing to our inter-relational synapses. "On this dreamscape, Rouch provokes us to consider aspects of the human condition in ways, to paraphrase [Milan] Kundera, that no theoretically sophisticated cultural analysis can do. (...) Techniques associated with the fiction side of the spurious opposition fact/fiction must be incorporated in future ethnographic practice and representation." (Stoller, 1992)

Cinema is already a transition from the real world to the imaginary world, just like ethnography is the translation of the thought system of some to the conceptual universe of others. When Jane Rouch defended that the Truth was more important than fiction, her husband argued that the things he wanted to show were hard to find, but it doesn't mean they are less true, just a *dramatic truth* in comparison to *documentary truth*, as he named them. The difference to Flaherty is that, instead of trying to show customs that the Inuit did not have anymore, Rouch was interested in depicting the present as it was at his time but optimizing his fieldwork.

OTHER COLLABORATIVE MODELS

Many fictional films in mainstream media make use of myths and legends as the premise that guides their story arguments. This was also the case of *The Fast Runner*, a dramatization of the *Atanarjuat* tale by filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk. It was the first feature-length film about an indigenous group in which the members of that society had authorial participation in every part of the project, including the narrative, which is "the aspect of ethnographic film-making in which authorship is most profoundly exercised, (...) the structuring of these rushes into a narrative, which is something that takes place whenever a film-maker wants to go beyond the merely descriptive." (Henley, 2020) Given the archetypical nature of this legend that surpasses temporal boundaries, the film had various elements of present culture, not making it less ethnographically important.

Considering that throughout our whole lives we are playing a role, one could state that the use of fiction in ethnographies is simply a dramatization of anthropological content. Based on that, some ramifications have been created having Rouch's 'ethnofiction' as their inspiration, regardless of achieving the same kind of result as he did. 'Docudrama', a subgenre under docufiction in which people play the parts of themselves, is a style that has been known for relying "on dramatized re-enactments of real historical events rather than raw actuality footage." (Mathew, 2014) In itself, 'docudrama' does not serve the main component of what makes an ethnography, namely, a representation of the life of others for use in various social or non-social sciences. While the 'ethnofiction' contains some elements of fiction, the 'docudrama' is a fictional film with some elements resembling reality.

Meanwhile, others have opted to base themselves specifically on Jean Rouch's ethnofiction instead of elaborating their particular way of using fiction in a collaborative project. Johannes Sjöberg extracted five aspects from Rouch's creative practice that were set as his guidelines when creating *Transfiction*, the fictional film he made with two transgender women in São Paulo, the city where I live. "Rouch's ethnofictions are based on *ethnographic filmmaking* methods and they are produced as *shared anthropology* in a collaborative, sometimes *reflexive* spirit, using certain traits of *improvised filmmaking* to draw on the *improvised acting* of his protagonists." (Sjöberg, 2008a)

Even though his analysis was correct in theory, there was another element that was essential to Rouch's character that Sjöberg was not able to capture. He says: "Inspired by Rouch's 'uncanny' approach, I wanted the protagonists to come up with their own ideas as part of an uncensored process. As it turned out, these improvisations would however not support any coherent narrative and have *little relevance for the subject matter of transgender*." (Sjöberg, 2008b; my emphasis) It is well-known that Rouch reportedly influenced the improvisation that his friends created, but all in all, they were his friends. When making alterations to the narratives that they created, he did not erase them by judging whether their contributions had enough *relevance for the subject matter of African.*

When ethnofiction filmmakers receive the narrative from their film subjects instead of creating it themselves, they are recognizing their inability to holistically understand what the locals go through. It is a moment of altruism that allows the ones who are in the central role of the film to have a voice in issues that concern themselves, regardless of what kind of message they formulate. However, some researchers act as if they did not appreciate what comes naturally from people, ignoring human beings as they are, with all their flaws and incapacities. They seem to believe that their subjects are supposed to forward a certain agenda according to the collective group to which they must belong. Ro fix our flawed reality and achieve an idealized society, their research needs to manipulate the truth. This is not the same as the myths that comprise and honor the past, or as the inclusion of enacted content to

better represent what the field is like in the present, but as the engineering of a fictional future that they have envisioned as being the perfect one.

MY METHODS OF COLLABORATION

SENDERS AND RECIPIENTS

The first rule that I established for myself when I first thought of including a fictional story written by a local theater club in my ethnography was that I must refrain from influencing them on the creation of the script. Even though I have now found certain similarities between my way of working and that of Jean Rouch, I did not know who he was at the moment when I thought of it. My first basic intent with this project was to be able to direct actors in my film while adding content that could be called 'anthropological' to my fieldwork despite its very short duration and, most importantly, to allow the locals to have priority in authoring their message. For me, it was only natural that my posture at the beginning of the project should be that of a listener to my collaborators. "As apprentices our first lesson was that one is ignorant; one knows nothing. From that time on we built our knowledge, and we continue to build it. Apprenticeship demands respect." (Stoller, 1989)

I have since learned that my trust in the eventual emergence of research material from a story created by the people that I met in the field was due to my natural affiliation with phenomenology, a characteristic present in the work of Michael Jackson. He believes that the amount of knowledge that can be transmitted through the values of locals cannot be disregarded because of the lack of scientific evidence. "What phenomenology calls into question is the longstanding division in Western discourse between the knowledge of philosophers or scientists and the opinions of ordinary mortals. Phenomenology seeks a corrective to forms of knowledge and description that, in attempting to isolate unifying and universal laws, lose all sense of the abundance and plenitude of life." (Feyerabend, 1987) By accommodating this social knowledge under a cartesian form of discourse, the research earns validity even when the targeted audience is academic.

> It's not renouncing our Cartesianism; it's considering the possibility that, besides our Cartesianism, besides our so-called scientific explanations, there are others. To ignore them means that we have an imperialist attitude, that we think that ours is the only way to live, that ours is the only way to think. In fact, I think that anthropology, and, perhaps, as you say, thanks to our visual anthropology (which allows us to share our culture with other cultures), will help us to discover that we are citizens of a world that is marvelous in its diversity. As long as we are unable to take on this diversity, we will have resolved nothing. But one day we will discover other systems of explication and of science, and our Cartesian science will be enriched by such discovery. (Rouch, 2003)

On the other hand, even though I was supposed to make a film to be part of a master's thesis, the audience that I had envisioned for my film was that of young Cameroonians. I designed my films to be watched by those who are frequently pictured as poor Africans in suffer so that they could see examples of people who came from the same conditions as them but that were fighting to earn a better living through studies, and producing artistic material of good quality in the process. By making a film

that did not demand to be deciphered by specialists, I would be able to tell people outside academia what my master's program was about. Everybody knows more or less what a chemist does, despite not being able to work as one, but many people that I meet do not understand what it means to be an anthropologist given to how hermetic our studies can be. The inclusion of a narrative can determine whether the knowledge obtained from a film will linger to the spectator and to others who will be invited to watch it.

Some people write poems, others write dramas, memoirs, ethnographic fiction, and recently graphic ethnography and creative non-fiction. These are all about expanding the audience so that more people around the world will read what ethnographers produce. Let us take the *Disappearing World* series as an example. The focus of its filmmakers was on the general public, not scholars. All the criticism on voiceover or other techniques used to attract the average spectator is relevant in academia but disregarded when the commercial value is the determinant to whether or not that film is worth being made and watched. As Marcus Banks compares, ethnographies for television are like the stories of Scheherazade: if you don't keep the attention of the audience, you will be "executed".

Rouch stated that, when making a film, the first audience that had to be satisfied by it was himself. His second audience was the people who appear in the film, what does not necessarily mean that they were not relevant or worth having the material adapted to their reality, as he exemplifies: "These films pose many questions. One of the most important is that the Dogon themselves never see more than three Sigui. We are preparing a film synthesis that will break this taboo for Dogon spectators. It's a question of transmitting knowledge that goes beyond the rules of classical ethnology." (Rouch, 2003) The remaining spectators would be the audience that he thought about the least, here included both scholars and non-academics.

Defining if the audience aimed by filmmakers must be either the paying spectators, as in the case of the *Disappearing Worlds* series, or the filmmakers themselves is not the priority. The most important is to have this public defined beforehand so that filmmakers can orient themselves by keeping these people in mind. To do so, I have established that each one of my films would have a different audience in mind, even though both of them would be comprehensible to the average person.

In *Accueil*, for instance, while I was thinking of showing the Camerwood cast to young Africans, they were excited about making a film in which they would be able to show an image of themselves different from the stigmatized Eurocentric version that foreigners usually see. On the other hand, *Accueil: Behind-the-Stories* is more aimed towards scholars, with a special focus on depicting the agencies, processes, and collaboration that were part of how our project was organized. Both films bear the same message, showing others how the process of welcoming foreigners in Ngaoundéré occurs, but one does so through a fictional scripted narrative while the other one captures those processes without a written narrative.

The university students that worked with me were the group with less social distinctions between us that I could find in Ngaoundéré. I felt comfortable making a project together with people coming from a rather similar background and to whom I could clearly say: We are "the same". I am a student from a colonized country who is amidst political and economic problems but I'm still thriving to advance in life. "In this way anthropologists become implicated participants in the lives of the people they represent. At Cinema Rouch, films go 'beyond observational cinema', which means they are more than empirical; they are radically empirical." (Stoller, 1992)

The 'radical empiricism' that I was practicing, before even being aware that this term existed, conditioned my posture for the period that I was going to stay in Cameroon. I did not behave as if I was traveling to that place for some months but was instead placing my mind as if I had *moved* to Cameroon. By assuming Ngaoundéré was the city where I *lived*, I did not focus on evaluating the domains in which I focused the components of my 'participant observation' as in the twelve steps enlisted by James P. Spradley (1980).

> Radically empirical anthropologists participate fully in the lives of those they seek to describe. How could it be otherwise if one is committed to a sensorially aware, experience-driven kind of fieldwork? In this sense, however, participation does not mean "participant observation", anthropology's most famous oxymoron; rather, it means that anthropologists open themselves to other worlds as they acknowledge their implication—their entanglement—in networks of social relations. (Stoller, 1992)

While to some degree I was also making a participant observation in my fieldwork, I tried as much as possible to let go of the analytical perspectives to obtain the experience of a person who inhabited that area. To live under the same conditions as my collaborators lived, I placed myself in the building that was closest to the campus, where a Veterinary Medicine student rented around 15 apartments. My room was by his side, since he wanted me to contact him whenever I needed, which was only necessary when I needed to pay him the rent and other bills. In my bedroom, there were two windows, a double bed and a wardrobe built inside brick walls by the end of my bed. Behind it, there was a smaller room with a sink and a shower.

In the beginning, I tried to wash with the water that came out of it, but then I started to feel itchy and even had a bacterial rash. I realized that that water had a white color when poured in a washbasin, so I started collecting it only to flush the external shared toilets that we used during the day (it was hard to use them during the night because there was no electric illumination, which would not even be guaranteed to work either, considering how unpredictable it was to know when there would be electricity in the building). I started using bottled mineral water to brush my teeth and pumped water from the well to wash.

Some people, locals and foreigners alike, questioned me why I would not want to be like the other foreigners who spend their days in a cozy place, such as the gated community called White or

Norwegian Neighborhood. Despite being located relatively close to the poorest people living in the urban scenario of Ngaoundéré, the facilities inside this community included a restaurant where hamburgers could be ordered at will and a swimming pool to refresh from the hot weather of Cameroon. However, being asked this question felt so absurd and uncomfortable to me that I was not able to answer them.

I wondered instead why somebody would travel all the way to Africa if they did not want to actually live in that continent but in a comfortable version of it. I agree with Michael Jackson's perspective that what sets us apart provides much less knowledge than how we can conjoin or connect ourselves. Instead of looking for the poorest of the poorest to shock those living in developed countries on what it means to be black and poor, a reality so distant to theirs, I was so accustomed to this setting in Brazil that my focus was more directed towards making choices that enabled the best experimentation I could have of the Cameroonian reality.

> Jackson's critique of anthropological neutrality and indifference is consistent with Tyler's censure of the epistemology of plain style and MacDougall's characterization of the 'numbness' of observational cinema. In a radically empirical anthropology, according to a phenomenologically and pragmatically informed Jackson, our experiences are central to the field enterprise and to the construction of anthropological knowledge. In this mode, our experiences become primary data. (Stoller, 1992)

When the experiences are limited to some visits to the outside, as with the couple I saw in the local market accompanied by two African men walking behind them to work on their security, the chaotic unknown can be easily observed from up close without the need of leaving what is already known to be orderly and safe. Many other facilities around the world provide experiences similar to this human safari, such as zoos. It is not a surprise that Sami people or Pygmies have been exhibited in the same place as animals in the past. Regardless of how open we are to what is different, all of us make use of certain fundamental boundaries in varying degrees of which are hard to let go. Radical empiricism is the attempt to achieve the elimination of such limits.

> The importance of this view for anthropology is that it stresses the ethnographer's interactions with those he or she lives with and studies, while urging us to clarify ways in which our knowledge is grounding in our practical, personal and participatory experience in the field as much as our detached observations. Unlike traditional empiricism, which draws a definite boundary between observer and observed, between method and object, radical empiricism denies the validity of such cuts and makes the interplay between these domains the focus of its interest. (Jackson, 1989)

THE MAKING OF AN ETHNODRAMA

Upon studying how Rouch's 'ethnofiction' worked as a model of collaboration, I came to understand that the procedures followed to make *Accueil* were not the same as his. Rouch relied on performing situations of anthropological relevance after years of intimacy were shared with the locals. Their connection allowed his subjects to improvise in a way that was already aligned to his research

intents, based on "Rouch's notion of 'shared anthropology' in which mutual trust and familiarity are built up over a long period in the field." (Stoller, 1992)

It cannot be categorized as a 'docudrama', either, since we did not use the film language of a documentary. *Accueil* can be compared to *cinéma vérité* in its style and develops a narrative in chronological sequence, not as the study and dramatization of a fact. All the scenes were filmed to make the audience believe that it was not acted. The idea is that an ethnographer was following a man who agreed to be filmed and interesting events happened to occur in front of the camera.

'Ethnodrama' is the name I give to the genre of fictional films whose procedures were adopted by us to make *Accueil*. It can be defined as a collaborative model of making films that contain ethnographic content in a dramatized form, in which time can be saved depending on the filmmaker's conditions to follow its 5 procedures. The narrative that guides an ethnodrama is decided beforehand with the collaborators as a story with beginning, development, and ending, even though it must present the processes of people's lives in a way that does not make it evident that the scenes were directed. The lines spoken in the film should be preferably improvised, when possible. According to my experience in the making of *Accueil*, these are the 5 steps to make an ethnodrama:

1. Invite people to work with you who have lived in the field for a long period and who are experienced in developing narratives. They can be a writer, an oral storyteller, a playwright, or the likes of it.

2. While the story of your fictional film is being created, avoid having any intervention in the writing process. The ability of your story to depict that given society depends on your absence as an ethnographer in this first moment.

3. Ask your collaborators for help on negotiating the actors and locations where the scenes will be staged. If their story includes a foreigner or someone with your physical characteristics, you can volunteer to act in the film.

4. Go back to the place where the film was shot and try to engage in conversations and further filming of the setting on a regular day, without the actors. It provides you with sufficient material for extra footage that was not part of the script.

5. Do not place yourself as the owner of the project. The assistance from others might become so crucial to your project when explaining the project to locals, helping you understand the situations, and even directing the actors that you might have to abdicate some authorship.

IV. DISCUSSED TIMEFRAME

FIRST SCRIPT MEETINGS

Sunday. April 28th, 2019.

Back in April, five days after I met Lawan and talked about the project we had our first script meeting at the university. The building had some parts of the floor covered with a mirror of water. The walls had a pattern of triangular holes through them that kept the temperature fresh but whose illumination rendered a big problem for my footage to be visible. The space was wide and could include our whole group of twenty people inside, four times more than what Lawan was expecting, even though the bench could not fit everybody sitting on it at the same time.

After Lawan presented the project to the members and visitors, I completed his words with my poorly spoken French, the voice that can be heard at the beginning of *Accueil: Behind-the-stories*. To be honest, I was having headaches after a fortnight speaking French only. Some people I simply could not comprehend, such as a man that could have become a potential character in my film, a clerk in the phone company, and the woman in the bakery that needed to speak English to me so that I could understand her. Despite my language constraints, I told the club that the film could be in French as well as in whatever other languages that they wanted it to be.

I know that the use of a single language in the film would optimize the transmission of their values, as Jean Rouch did in his films. "The reason why he was able to give a voice to the protagonists of his ethnofictions was simply that they all spoke in French." (Henley, 2009) However, I saw the multilingualism as a creative feature that I inserted through the colored subtitles of *Accueil: Behind-the-stories* to better resemble their reality. Therefore, all subtitles are written in a different color depending on what language they were translated from. French in white, Fufuldé in yellow, English in blue, Mboum in green, and Dii in red. This decision cost me exhausting hours of translations afterward, but I do not regret prioritizing respect for showing their communication as it is. "The language is very important in the media because it drives cultural, political and social meanings." (Convents, 2003)

After our explanation, Lawan asked them who would like to take part in the project. Two of the students that were present just to learn what the project was about did not want to take part in it, even though one of them later contacted me for one of his own film projects. Out of the remaining 17 students, seven wanted to write possible stories to be dramatized and thus were placed in front of the others to select which students would be part of their teams, so that they could write brief synopses during the evening since the second meeting was scheduled for the following day.

Unfortunately, I was not able to capture any image of this day that was worth including in my films. I had not brought adequate equipment to the set, such as lights and the tripod. After some days I started to feel the aftermath of carrying around the heavy backpack that contained the camera. At a

certain moment of the first script meeting, I finished one of my comments by asking them if I could have a seat, as I was about to faint from hypoglycemia. I could later see the rate by which I was losing my strength with how crooked and shaky the footage of that day was becoming.

I went to Lawan's place afterward where his girlfriend recovered my energy by serving me couscous, albeit that dish sharing only its name with the couscous that we eat in Brazil. Even after my stay in Cameroon, my fingers are still not used to the direct heat of the food when eating with the hands. However, I was so weak that it did not matter. After spending that day with the long curly hairdo that I had at the time and also wearing contact lenses to have a better appearance and cause a good first impression on the students, my image was destroyed by that evening.

Monday. April 29th, 2019.

The following day I inverted the strategy for my Impression Management, as Goffman (1956) would put it. Instead of the looks that drew attention to me on the streets, I opted for wearing my thick glasses and a beanie to hide my hair. This might not look intentional, but from my first day in Cameroon, I started the process of convincing people I was just like them. Some actions were effective, such as buying local clothes or the Brazilian soccer team uniform that started some conversations about my nationality. Others were mistakes, though, like asking a hairdresser to braid my hair in an afro style that made me look more like a soccer star that uses feminine hairdos than as a local myself.

The identity was also negotiated through my actions. The first performance that I always use when traveling somewhere to avoid being robbed is to replace the typically impressed tourist gaze for some apathetic eyes, to look used to the place, always heading firmly towards a direction. Making silly comments mostly helped me with female cashiers and attendants, who are generally very closed and rude in Cameroon but treat me better when I show them that I am a nice person. Eating with my fingers has also proved to be helpful as a first impression. A certain day a Chadian photographer was so shocked that he took a picture of me merely eating with them.

And there I was for the second script meeting, correctly equipped and dressed so that all of their attention would go to Lawan's instructions and not to the foreigner that was filming them. He asked each person to come in front of the group and give a summary of what they had envisioned as a story that talked about how Cameroon (un)welcomes immigrants. In *Accueil: Behind-the-stories*, I made sure to include Lawan's authority when asking the participants to be present on time, leading the improv games that help actors socialize and relax while waiting for everybody to arrive, reprehending one of the students who was hogging the meeting and overall hierarchically directing the process so that all seven stories had time to be told and discussed.

THE SEVEN STORIES

Despite Adamaoua being labelled as a 'zone of risk' by the United Nations, most of the topics suggested by the Camerwood cast to address the question of welcoming mobile people in the region are universally human. Ranging from love relations to stories of war, these narratives possess an amazing variation while still being relatable to people from any part of the world. The procedures of making an ethnodrama rely on the individual's adaptation of their particular issues into archetypal stories, thus being able to be used in virtually any fieldwork.

Photo of the Camerwood crew taken at the end of the second script meeting.

1st. Célestin's group created the story of Paulie, a young man who arrived to study at the University of Ngaoundéré but ended up losing his connections and had to rely on the help of locals to survive. His story mixed the sensations of refugees who come to Ngaoundéré with the surprises that Célestin and his group had faced themselves upon arriving as students in a foreign country, as an imagination exercise of what their student life would have become without the previously established living conditions of which they make use.

2nd. Suzane was the one whose story more resembled the final version that became *Accueil*. She explored the lack of a welcoming attitude from the locals towards the refugees, exemplified in sentences like "if you come because you had problems in the Extreme-North region, you will bring these problems here." By contrasting positive and negative views of the local population on the arrival of a family of refugees, Suzane followed the dialectic idea that I proposed to Lawan as an ideal script during our first conversation. On the occasion, Lawan almost completed my words when I suggested the existence of a thesis, an antithesis, and a synthesis.

3rd.   The "Miss", as she is called by her friends due to her beauty, is a Chadian girl who also uses a little of her own back story to create her suggestion for the script. I was able to visit her in another opportunity when she was discussing her idea for the script of a future project with Lawan. Her bedroom had a fully equipped bathroom and kitchen in it, making me happy to see that the comfort of my place was that of the average student, somewhere in between Lawan's and hers. Her story was also about a wealthy young lady who fell in love with a poor foreigner student and had to convince her family, friends, and society of accepting their relationship.

4th.   Palalou, the Nigerian of the group, brought two different analyses of how the welcoming occurs in that place. Geographically, he referred to the region of Adamaoua as a 'middle-land', in English. This region was formerly part of his country and is now located in a part of the Cameroonian triangle that makes it receive people from all directions. Religiously, he was inspired by one of his students who told him that his father was Muslim and his mother Christian, common in the Adamaoua region. He created a narrative that combined both aspects, in which a child was welcomed in both religious environments, causing a surprise to those from other lands who were not used to it.

5th.   Lawan's group wrote a story similar to Suzane's by including a group of refugees from the Extreme-North region escaping the Boko Haram terrorists and who would try to be accepted in Adamaoua. Lawan contrasts this group to that of traditional ethnic groups present in the region, such as the Mboum, and to the visitors that live in the White/Norwegian Neighborhood. Their story includes a conflict that is resolved by the traditional authority in the village who is still regarded as the one responsible for bringing the agreement to this kind of problem, the man called *chef du village*, chief of the village. Due to time constraints, *Accueil: Behind-the-stories* does not show the presentations of Lawan and Richard.

6th.   Richard's story lacked a coherent narrative, as it seemed that his priority was in making a story about how Africans rely on the honesty of white people only because they are white. In fact, the word *blanc* was repeated by him dozens of times during his presentation, which only became comprehensible in the end when the *chef du village* of his "story" chased away all the white people who were causing harm. Richard's racist posture was a preview of what I would later experience with another Chadian, the one who complained to Lawan about his relationship with me after the worshipping session, and also with Richard himself.

7th.   The story created by the "grand Dr. Scofield", as he calls himself, is the one I would be glad to transform into a film someday given its deeply emotional narrative, but that was unfortunately not aligned with this project because of the high budget it would require and the clearly fictional dialogues that do not match an ethnodrama. After a conflict between opposing groups of migrants and locals culminates in bloodshed, the voice of God comes upon the survivors, who then realize the wrongs of their actions and end up embracing themselves in tears.

President Lawan then suggested a script that mathematically summed up the most prominent ideas of their stories, which would later become the final version of *Accueil*. The story of a family of refugees (*logos*) who was given a piece of land by a local landlord. His son, unaware of it, comes back after a couple of years away and is told by a cattle herder that this group of foreigners was stealing his father's land. He approaches the family with a machete in a violent fight (chaos) that is only stopped by a pair of mediators who take them to the *chef du village* (order) who gives them a speech of how, wherever Africans arrive, that land is their home, except for Europe. The two former foes come to terms and are later seen treating each other as brothers while sharing a drink in the local *cabaret*.

I found it important to include some footage in *Accueil: Behind-the-stories* that showed how collaborative Lawan was by letting others make comments and even disagree with him, including me. None of my comments altered the story, though, which would go against the principle I had established for being absent in this particular stage of the project. All I contributed with at the time was about not letting their experience of writing plays make the script too theatrical instead of cinematic, as by dividing the film into two acts of 15 minutes each. Palalou and the Miss were able to understand my intentions despite my communication weaknesses and explained them to Lawan and the others as if they had read my Project Description, the only document I had made up to that point that included my film ideas.

FINAL SCRIPT MEETINGS

Tuesday. April 30th, 2019.

The third meeting was as long as the second one but can be basically summarized as an assertion of details, such as locations and who would play each role. Lawan, for instance, wanted to be the refugee farmer but the group made him play the main mediator since this character is more related to his personality and role in the theater club. They then decided that non-actors would be invited to play parts in the film that were related to who they were in real-life.

At a certain moment, I reinforced that in that stage of the project I was like "a cameraman". Richard immediately asked Lawan who the conductor of the project was then, to which I intervened to say that it was Lawan. Maybe that was the moment when I went too far in my attempts to make my absence from the scriptwriting and my equality to them entirely explicit. No footage of this meeting was included in *Accueil: Behind-the-stories*, which followed directly to the next day.

Wednesday. May 1st, 2019.

Lawan and I went to his neighbor's place early in the morning to infer where people belonging to the traditional ethnic groups could be found nearby. The meeting, who was all spoken in Dii, ended by having another neighbor named Yahwa offering to take us on his motorbike to a nearby place where

many Mboum lived. There we met Eliane, a young mother of two who accepted to play the wife with her brother-in-law, Arly, playing the husband. Yahwa, Eliane, and Arly would later become the three main characters of my film, all of them bearing no previous acting experience. We may say that that location was my first real contact with the widespread image of a very poor Africa. The one thousand inhabitants of that village are distinctively separated between the ones who live in big masonry houses and the ones who stay in improvised shelters, such as Eliane and her two children.

The way they relate to cleanness and dirt was especially interesting to me. Their hygiene requirements are maybe more flexible than in Brazil or Norway, possibly due to the lack of basic sanitation. However, at the same time that Eliane's domestic utensils are washed in a plastic washbasin filled with dark water that may not make them entirely clean, her little daughter makes sure she goes inside and takes a small towel to cover a block of cement before sitting on it. The children's clothes may be worn out due to transferring to the next sibling, but I could see that they were kept washed. It was not uncommon to see young boys wearing clothes and sandals that had probably come from female relatives.

We then headed to our first encounter with the *chef du village*, whose first impression could not have been worse. Unused to authorities agreeably chosen by birthright, I found it very presumptuous to give Lawan and I exactly 15 minutes to speak, as if we were his vassals. Nevertheless, I respected his role and we were able to convince him of participating in our film. In the months that followed, he demonstrated such kindness to me when I found myself in moments of trouble that I started to realize how these societal responsibilities can become part of the bearer's personality. One day he gave me a ride when I had to walk for 9 Km from the downtown of Ngaoundéré to my place so that I could save money, he also gave me *kossam* when I felt hungry and, most importantly, he provided the most emotional performance of *Accueil*.

It is important to note that no specific lines were written for these non-actors aside from a synopsis of the story to which the participants had access. The situation depicted was so common to them that we were able to emulate Rouch's *ciné-trance* without the need of following his original process. "Inspired by the re-enactments in Robert Flaherty's documentaries, Rouch asked his friends and informants to improvise on the theme of migration. (...) ...Rouch described his occasional 'flows' of collaborative improvisation as 'ciné-trance' when filming with the protagonists..." (Sjöberg, 2009) In an ethnodrama, the connection that triggers improvisation is not between the crew and the filmmaker, but between the participants and role that they already play in the society where they live.

The unexpectedness that Rouch appreciated as an artistic initiative in his films can also be found in this scenario since the society that serves as their inspiration is full of surprises as well. "Rouch was the filmmaker who wanted to use his camera as Louis Armstrong had played his trumpet, always hoping to improvise unexpected harmonies with his subjects." (Henley, 2009) This kind of

improvisation is naturally absorbed in an ethnodramatic project due to its inherent characteristic of having fictional narratives from oral tradition inserted in an ethnographic context.

> It's very simple. There's no formula. Working with people who are champions of the oral tradition, it's impossible to write scenarios, impossible to write dialogues. So I am obliged to surrender myself to this improvisation that is the art of the Logos, the art of the word and the gesture. You have to set off a series of actions to see, all of a sudden, the emergence of the truth, of the disquieting action of a person who has become disquieted. (Rouch, 2003)

Thursday. May 2nd, 2019.

The last meeting before shooting the film was in Lawan's place, where he was joined by Richard and Palalou to fix the last details of the script. I invited myself to film it as well since one of my backup plans was an ethnographic film about the friendship of a local Cameroonian with his Nigerian and Chadian friends and fellow students. Moreover, that meeting would be the end of my absence from the project so that I would finally be able to apply my perspectives on it after the script was finalized. After being told by Lawan that they had nothing else to discuss, I started asking questions, such as names of characters and exact sequences that had to be filmed. At this moment Richard said: "We can take care of this; you are just the cameraman."

For the next five minutes, Richard listened to a rather upset Renato explaining to him who the conductor of the project was from that moment on. I gave him examples of my professional and academic experience with filmmaking, mentioned the importance of Gestalt techniques for the spectator's brain to fill the gaps in a sequence, told my intentions for the project and why it was necessary for them to prove to me that they were a qualified team capable of providing me a feasible project. As I had plenty of time left in Cameroon, I could dismiss them at any moment and start doing non-fictional Visual Anthropology fieldwork with no second thought. It is incredible how a foreign language flows easily when one is enraged.

Richard remained silent while Palalou and Lawan explained to me the details of their script, including how the names of the characters would be relevant for the ethnic groups they belonged to. One of the ideas that Richard was defending was that the story about a wealthy young lady created by the Miss could be mixed with the one we had, transforming her into the daughter of the mediator so that the actors could play roles as well as the non-actors. The decision of keeping this side story or removing it was addressed to me, who then started to be seen as the conductor to the group.

Even though I wanted to say yes so that Richard and I would have a good relationship from then on, but I had to dismiss it. It demanded to have my camera pointing towards people on the streets who would make negative comments about the couple formed by the wealthy young lady and the foreigner, but in ethnodrama we pretend to be filming an ethnography about one person who agreed to participate. This side story would be too obviously theatrical if I were filming my subjects and, like

a miracle, my camera pointed exactly towards the people who would start making comments about them.

DAYS OF SHOOTING

Saturday. May 4th, 2019.

The next Saturday we students walked our way to Eliane's neighborhood, where the sequences started to be filmed. I had imagined starting the day by showing their routine when preparing food for her household before going to the farm. However, it was not the period of plowing the land, the students were having fun close to us and the whole arrangement of food for her brother-in-law to play her husband made her nervous and it took a while to have her stop laughing. Arly's only difficulty was that he had not understood what the project was about and then started to talk to the camera in Mboum as if I were a reporter recording their situation for a news channel. After Lawan explained it to him, his acting was perfect. Yahwa, on the other hand, was a little repetitive in his improvisations, which can be perceived even in the edited final version of *Accueil*.

In the first attempt of the machete fight scene, Eliane was still laughing and went after the assaulter barehanded. I stopped the scene and, with the help of Suzane who was close to us to play the wife of the attacker, Eliane understood that laughing was not permitted. Lawan then came to us and explained that he had seen her trying to stop the armed man, which was not how a woman in that society would behave. At this moment, two men arrived to stop the quarrel that they were watching from far away, playing in real life exactly the roles of mediators that Lawan and Scofield would be performing a few moments later. This made me even more certain that their script really reflected how that society works. All of us then walked to the *chef*'s place, where Yahwa's actual father came to our encounter to play his role as the man who gave that land to the refugees, yet another coincidence.

After filming the *chef*'s speech, we all left his home and I could perceive Arly was rather irritated. I told him that it was an unpaid student project, but he did not seem happy about it. Days before finishing my fieldwork in July Lawan told me that Suzane had to pay him when I was not around, otherwise he would not stop complaining. Eliane simply asked for rice to replace the food she had used to prepare the breakfast scene, which sounded completely reasonable to me. The actors would be reunited again to shoot the *cabaret* scene on the following Wednesday.

Monday. May 6th, 2019.

At that moment I was not completely satisfied with the footage I had captured so far. Despite having got amazing performances surprisingly from the non-actors, I had not yet captured footage for the film that I had originally envisioned. I wanted to trick the audience into believing that it was a regular ethnographic film until the very end when the truth would be revealed. If I wanted to make

fiction look like an ethnographic film, I had to perform a participant observation with the non-actors that were in *Accueil*.

I started filming the village from far until Eliane invited me to walk closer to her. It was then that I found out that, despite being a mother of two, she was just 19 years old at the time of the shooting, a great justification for her past habit of laughing nonstop. I met her 4 sisters who live close to her, most of them being mothers as well. The children reproduce the aggressive way that they are treated by their mothers to younger children. I took Eliane's 3-year-old daughter and her 8-month-old son in my arms and gave each a kiss on the cheek in hopes of teaching them other ways of behaving.

It was also important for me to use our moments inside her simple home during a rainstorm to show how close my reality is to hers. I had been instructed in the university that giving something personal helps us receive back. I was able to show how teenage pregnancy is common in the neighborhood I come from as well by showing my brother who became a father at the age of 15. Some pictures of me as a child surrounded by people of all colors, many of them black, helped her understand I am not like other Europeans that get impressed to see black Africans for the first time.

The way they treated me when I spent the day with them, serving me food and offering their seats is pretty similar to what I have seen in all Cameroonian homes. To be honest, I don't remember a period of my life that I ate as much as when I was in Africa. Of course, they also sold me mangoes and mushrooms that I actually wanted to buy. Their economic intentions also came to my knowledge during the translation process, when I found out that some of the interactions from the children were actually their parents telling them to ask me to buy food for them, which I could not understand at the time. I stayed with them until the end of daylight when the camera could no longer film.

Tuesday. May 7th, 2019.

I woke up at 4 in the morning the following day so that I could capture the moment when Eliane woke up and opened her front door. This morning in her neighborhood without other students was essential for collecting the most beautiful footage that later started *Accueil*. I stayed with them until Lawan arrived with Yawa so that he could rehearse the *cabaret* scene with Arly for the last day of shooting. After they finished, I invited myself to follow Arly to his job as a carpenter building a property, but that footage ended up not being necessary for any of the films.

Wednesday. May 8th, 2019.

The last day of footage was the opportunity for all the members of the theater club to be able to act in *Accueil*. While I was with Eliane, Lawan was rehearsing their lines and arranging a *cabaret* that accepted us to film in it after the first one declined their offer upon seeing who the cameraman was. This was the day in which Lawan went full-strength as a director before the scene started. When

the scene was again more theatrical than it should, I also intervened with the actors that I already knew by name, then. Our ability to negotiate with each other the best way of directing the group in a short time, added to his skills as a producer, made me realize that neither I nor he was the conductor of that project, but both of us were conductors and co-directors.

After the scene was shot, we headed to Lawan's place where the students were passing pictures of him to each other. I noticed a trend in Lawan not only being the leader of many artistic groups, but he was often positioned in the center of the pictures, close to the public authorities in them. That was the moment when he captured my attention in a way that I could not resist but ask him if I could spend the remaining two months making a film about him.

PRECOCIOUS ENDING

When I decided to make a project with a group of students, I could not fathom the time restriction of two weeks that we had to conclude before their study break was over. In *Struggle for a Living,* Trond Waage (2002a) spent a long time in the field until he could have a close relationship with the person who later became his collaborator, sharing with him editing authorship about the selection of scenes for the film. My project occurred in the opposite order since I already had in mind the idea of collaboration that I wanted to execute before meeting the people who would accept to make the ethnodramatic film with me.

Through our project I was able to experience the importance of storytelling in enabling people to have their voices heard, as seen by their willingness to engage in the creation of stories that all of us are eager to tell. Even though the result was successful, after the shooting was concluded I felt like I still had much more to learn, especially about participant observation. I then decided to use the remaining two months I had in Ngaoundéré filming Lawan's life, in an attempt to make the best use of my time there by collecting extra material for another film in case my fictional project was rejected.

However, in the end, neither of my films made substantial use of the two months I spent with Lawan. Instead, I lived with him various crises, engaged in moments involving uncurable diseases, romantic relationships, considerations for the future, being kicked out of the public hospital because of my camera, and so on. To be honest, many of the conflicts I experienced during fieldwork would have been avoided if people were not aware that the camera in my hands was so obviously a video one. But maybe the biggest relevance of the camera for me (besides its weight that caused my wrists to still crack nowadays) was exactly its chaotic imperfections to which I had to bring order so that I could become the Anthropologist that synthetizes my visual experiences in this thesis.

> I learned with the Dogon that the essential character in all these adventures is not God, representing order, but the foe of God, the Pale Fox, representing disorder. So I have a tendency, when I'm filming, to consider the landscape you're talking about as precisely the work of God, and the presence of my camera as an intolerable disorder. It's this intolerable disorder that becomes a creative object. (Rouch, 2003)

V. CONCLUSION

The knowledge acquired by me during the trimester I lived in Ngaoundéré was of unrivaled proportions thanks to the people that worked with me there. The ideas that were in my mind before landing in Cameroon could have been completely lost if I had not found the people who accepted my invitation to embark on a type of production that I was not even certain of being feasible in the short time that I had to be there. The members of the theater club embraced my endeavor with such passion and dedication that time did not work against us in any way.

Because what I primarily asked them to do was a part of their upbringing that can sometimes be lost in adult life in a big city. My request was for them to practice storytelling in a way that did not deprive them of having control of how the story would be told. I learned from my fieldwork experience that my achievements were as high as my concessions to the other. Had I presented a different project that disregarded their leading role in the treatment of a narrative, I doubt that I would have obtained such diligence in the preparation of our project, immediate response to solve the unexpected production problems, and patience for my ineptitude as a learning director.

Valid ethnographic content can be obtained in short fieldwork if the people invited to join are treated by the ethnographer on equal terms. Even the most well-intended researchers must be attentive to how reciprocal the relationship that they establish in the field is. By crossing eyes with the subject, ethnographers can see themselves reflected in the other and treat them as they would like to be treated. Because of our patronizing view of the other as fragile or incapable, anthropologists are accused of looking at our research subjects as if they were insects. The collective perception of the other as an amorphous mass with no individuality is the danger of perceiving identities instead of humans, *anthropos*.

Each member of the Camerwood cast presented an idea of a story related to their own experiences in life. Célestin had faced challenges as a foreign student. Suzane had witnessed prejudice towards others and brought it to her story. The Miss pictured herself inside a conflict by using an avatar of herself. Palalou regarded the matter from a Nigerian perspective. Lawan was still moved by his recent discoveries about his own ethnic group that was traditional to that area and applied it to the film. Richard is still learning about how to deal with the white people who have caused so much harm to his country. Last but not least, Scofield believes that his religious practices could contribute to the dialogue about tolerance and acceptance of who is different.

The translation of their experiences into fictional stories appeared to be natural to them. Of course, as a theater club, they are used to this type of request. But after observing so many discourse strategies from each one of them, I discovered a characteristic of fiction that I had not known before. Fiction allows us to talk about ourselves in a way that is free of embarrassment. Since we are detached

from the narrative that we created we can explore what was and what could be, thus exploring a part of the events in our lives that for one reason or another could not be performed, but that is no less relevant to understand who we are as human beings.

Fiction is a trustworthy element in ethnographies nowadays if we are passive towards its formulation. We are who we are as consequences of the events that happen in our lives, and so we can use what we have learned about ourselves in a fictional narrative to represent our present selves. Likewise, the wisdom of the past is still sought after through the tales told by the griots because they are cumulative knowledge that was collected after many generations. What must be avoided in Anthropology is the active construction of a fictional reality, which can only work as a particular version of the world made by the filmmaker. The use of fiction in ethnography must preserve its use as a tool to interpret the world, not shape it.

In this sense, the ethnodrama presents itself as a genre that helps the filmmaker to use fiction while refraining from corrupting the main objective of an ethnography. By avoiding interventions before the conclusion of the writing phase the ethnographer can observe his film subjects to learn not only how they are delivering their creations but also what were the origins of such thoughts that occur to them. The fact that the ones in charge of writing are professional creators of narratives also helps the ethnographers to understand their position as apprentices.

Maybe these lessons were important for me to control my own pride, which could have caused me problems during my fieldwork, a situation in which I depended so much on others that I included asking for support in my 5 steps. But I believe that these ethnodramatic procedures can also be of use for other first-time ethnographers still afraid of experimenting in the field without risking the loss of precious fieldwork time.

I can claim to have authorship of a film that was not written by me if I look for ways to make my presence in the film notable despite the necessary initial moment of silence. The filmmaker can then proceed to other activities, such as going to the field without the actors, influencing whether the narrative is being applied plausibly, directing the crew in the activities, and so on. But, most importantly, in a collaborative space where dialogue between different cultures is possible, the opportunity of assimilating other authors to the project should be celebrated instead of avoided.

When the maxim that 'any form of communication will undoubtedly create something else' is applied to transcultural dialogues, we can see that the products of a collaborative work create comprehension, builds relationships, and results in a work in which all parts involved can be proud of what was achieved together. Each ethnographer will discover how collaboration will or will not be part of their projects, which can oscillate from non-active participation to radical empiricism, each form holding its own scope of results and reasons to be done.

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