

St. Andrew's School

A summary of my fieldwork

January – July 2012

3,150-3,850 words

Navn

SOSANT4200 – Felttarbeid feltrapport

University of Oslo, spring 2012

DESCRIPTION OF THE FIELDWORK

Beskrivelse av feltarbeidet. Tilgang, forløp, varighet og eventuelle språklige utfordringer er særlig sentralt. Gjør dessuten rede for eventuelle avvik i forhold til prosjektbeskrivelsen.

I have conducted fieldwork at St. Andrew's School and in the nearby community over two of three terms of their academic year – from early January until early July. During this period, I have had access to almost everything going on within the school and I have established personal relationships to a number of individuals in the nearby community that have given me access to a number of social arenas also there. In this section, I will give a brief overview of the various relations that I have utilized to produce data, and of some challenges faced.

My role within the school has been very reminiscent to that of a teacher, though I have also established friendly relationships with a small number of students. While these called me by my first name, the students who did not know me that well – as well as the teachers when speaking to students – referred to me as 'Mr. Bjorn' or as 'Sir'. This habit turned out to be impossible to break, though I tried as I felt that it created an unnecessary distance.

Outside the school, my most productive relations were with the more prominent, older citizens – those who own land or local businesses, and who have stayed in the area for a long time. These relations were usually sustained by visiting their homes, drinking tea and talking, and my network of acquaintances extended as I was introduced to family and other friends during these visits. The main method of data-collection with this group was informal conversation where I got to ask questions, and where I often returned a few days later for another visit and further questions.

While I did have contact with the local government representative ('Chief') and the headmasters of the local schools, I introduced myself to the community at large in a Sunday service in the largest of the local churches. This was very efficient, and my presence in the area seemed to be much more welcomed after that.

It should be noted that I have spent time doing archival research in some of the school holidays. This has been of varying use, though it has contributed significantly to constructing an understanding of the history of the school and the nearby area – a topic I will return to in the next section.

For security reasons, I have not been able to spend much time either in the school or in the nearby community in the evenings. I stayed in a campsite about 20 km. away, which was the nearest available accommodation, and the stretch of road in between has been troubled with carjackings and other violent crimes after dark throughout my fieldwork. I arranged to stay in teachers' private guestrooms on a few occasions, but felt uncomfortable doing this too much.

I have not learned Swahili or any African languages to an extent that allowed me to conduct interviews in them. This was partly a conscious choice of how to spend my time, and partly because no single language would have sufficed to communicate with everybody in the area. The working language in St. Andrew's is English, and English is widely spoken also in the nearby community. A number of the older people do not speak English at all, but many of them do not speak Swahili either. Place 1¹ is home to people from a great number of tribes, and no single language would have allowed me to communicate with everyone.

METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES

En redegjørelse for de metodiske strategier som har vært brukt i feltarbeidet. I hvilke roller har du opptrådt? På hvilke arenaer har du deltatt? Hva slags data er innhentet og hvordan? Hvilke problemer støtte du på underveis? Hvilke valg ligger til grunn for datainnsamlingen? Hvilke begrensninger har materialet, slik du vurderer det?

Throughout the fieldwork, I was conscious of being honest. Whenever I introduced myself, I told as much as I found reasonable about my project, and I answered all questions in quite great detail. This, and my willingness to discuss my project and ideas

¹ Stedsnavnene er sensurert i denne eksempelp rapporten som er for studenter på SOSANT4200. De to stedsnavnene som er fjernet har blitt erstattet med Place 1 og Place 2. (Fotnote og sensurering gjort av studiekonsulent på SAI).

with those who were interested, shaped my closest relationships both within and outside the school to a large extent.

As mentioned in the previous section, I had a role reminiscent of a teacher within the school and became friendly with a small number of students. The teachers saw me largely as a colleague, and our interactions were friendly. The down-side of this relation was that I found it very difficult to interview them in a formal sense, and most of the data I have on the teachers' experiences and viewpoints derives from more informal settings. Given the relationship I had to the teachers, I will also find it hard to write about them, though I have a number of key points from conversations with them that I would like to cite.

I enjoyed good relations with a number of the non-teaching staff – gardeners, cleaners, guards and the like – though it was hard to find time to have proper conversations with them as they are closely supervised in their work. However, many of them understood that I was not a teacher in the school, and they were open and honest – at times critical towards the school and joking with me – whenever I spoke to them.

I have mentioned the problems with travelling after dark, which also limited my access to this group. A great number invited me to have dinner with their families, but I had to decline quite systematically. Instead, I conversed with them about their families and background. In some instances, I worked alongside them to get to talk to them, which was efficient. I also arranged with their supervisor to get a number of them out of their duties for short, formal interviews one morning. This was immensely popular with them, and the problem became limiting their numbers rather than getting them to turn up.

Outside the school, in the nearby community, I enjoyed various friendly relationships, though there was always a consciousness that I was different from them. However, with the people I worked the most with, I quite soon overcame the idea that I was working *for* St. Andrew's. Instead, I told them that I was writing a history of the community that would focus on their relations to the school. The term 'history' was chosen because few had any grasp of the social sciences, though they all understood the concept of an historical work.

With regards to data, I suggested three particular areas of focus in my research proposal:

1. Exchange relations and the “cultural biography of things” used and consumed within the school. This was intended to give insight into the forms and extent of integration of the school with the nearby community beyond what actors describe and perceive.
2. A study of spatiality and the organization of space in an historical context, seeking to understand how space is organized and bounded, and the historical development of that. This was intended as a response to the ethnographies T.P.R. Caldeira, J. Ferguson and others have produced of expatriates and elite groups in developing countries in the neoliberal world economy.
3. Interaction and personal relationships between students and members of the nearby community: “The best analyses of these situations will likely combine observational data from the event with later interviews or conversations with differently positioned actors to explicate on how they understood the situation and their role in it.”

During the fieldwork, focus on the first of these points turned out to be difficult for a variety of reasons, including problems in getting an overview of the operations of procurement overall, while the two latter have been with me as key topics throughout the fieldwork. The organization and use of space – as well as various historical topics – were accessible in the sense that people were interested in talking about it, which has generated a good dataset.

I have also had several chances to be with the students when they leave the school compound for various outings, and to talk to the students about these experiences. While there are few or no personal relationships in the sense of long-lasting engagement between the same individuals, there are a number of interactions through charity work, sports events and other occasions. To a certain extent, I used these experiences to explore their perception of some of the key ideas found in the school – leadership, service and charity – which worked well. The school as a whole also has a great number of employees living outside the compound, entering and leaving on a daily basis, and the flow of information and stories between the school and the surroundings is another topic that I believe I have enough data to analyze.

Within the school, a significant limitation to the data produced is the low number of interviews with Asian (Indian) students and the lack of focus, in the interviews I do have, on their experience of the social and racial dynamics within the school. Both African and European students see the Asian students as slightly different and sticking together in a small community amongst themselves, which I think they do to a large extent, but this topic was difficult to discuss with the Indian students.

ANALYTICAL TOOLS

En diskusjon av analytiske verktøy. Hvilke teoretiske innfallsvinkler og problemstillinger lå til grunn for feltarbeidet? Hvordan endret de seg eventuelt etter hvert? Hvilke nye erkjennelser har du gjort? Hvilke analytiske muligheter synes å åpne seg i ettertid?

My research proposal was heavily geared towards working with concrete, physical manifestations of social relations – the history of things, spatial organization – but my fieldwork soon became geared towards ideas and discourses that prevail in the area. Within the school, I found that ideas of leadership, service and charity formed a backbone of the school's programmes, and I explored these ideas with both members of staff and students. I also sought to participate in the arenas where these ideas were communicated – chapel, the leadership course offered to the older students, charity trips and various types of service-work done by the students. Some other arenas were unfortunately largely unavailable to me, again because of the issues with travelling after dark, though I have a number of accounts of them and how the students experience them and believe that they are, in many ways, quite similar to the arenas I did participate in. Overall, I believe that these various projects are intended to and do convey a quite holistic ideology, and that what I have observed will be useful in analyzing that.

The few parents that I did get to talk to spoke of responsibility and leadership. My interviews with parents are too few and too short to be analyzed on their own, but they do give an indication of the extent to which parents agree with and reflect the ideas and discourses found within the school. I think they do, to a very large extent, though I am unsure how the causality on that works.

Another choice that I was faced with – which will influence the form and content of my final thesis – is how to deal with the Christian aspect of school life. The school has a heavily Christian ethos and their version of Christian ideals are underlying in everything that goes on. A majority of teachers and students are devout Christians (though a minority of students are Muslims and Sikh), and also in the nearby community I found that the majority were Christians in various senses of the word.

I soon decided not to focus on religion as a topic, but rather leave it as underlying to the other topics I explored. In analytical terms, this means that I do not have adequate data to perform an analysis of religion in its own right, but rather will work towards an understanding of how it influences the other topics I do work with.

About two months into the fieldwork, I had the idea of creating a social network map of the approx. 300 students within the school by asking each to provide me with basic information on their family background and a list of their five or ten closest friends. While I still believe that this would have yielded very interesting results, I could not carry it through because the headmaster refused to let me do questionnaires that were not anonymous. Instead, I do have a complete anonymous dataset of current students and their ages, number of years at St. Andrew's, religions and parents' occupations (unfortunately not very well specified) from the school's student files, and a similar dataset from 1981. When I tried to compile more in-depth datasets myself, the students' responses have so many blanks that they become analytically useless.

This leaves me with a number of interviews that say a lot about the backgrounds and families of individual students, but no information on the statistical distribution of the different backgrounds. I do, however, believe that the interviews can be useful in discussing/deconstructing the notion of 'elite children' by showing the varieties in backgrounds, as well as in commenting on the growth of the Kenyan middle class. This latter point would need to be supported by findings from other research, situating the current students socially and historically.

Analytically, I also think that generation or age will become significant. I have been working with teenagers in a country with a very young population where ideas of development and social change are prominent in the public debate. There is a general

sense – both among students in St. Andrew’s and among the people I worked with in the nearby community; among rich and poor – that traditions, tribalism and corruption is holding Kenya back from developing, and a number of people relate this to generations. These are seen as traits of the older people. Within the school, tribal identities are insignificant while national identities (Kenyan, Ugandan) are important, and a number of the students explicitly accuse their parents of being tribalist and racist. They see themselves as a new generation, void of these negative traits, while at the same time retaining identities as ‘Africans’ (a term they often use themselves) and taking pride in a number of traits related to being such.

Discussions on the upcoming election are often framed in understandings along generational lines, too – that the old politicians are blocking the young ones, and thereby blocking change. I will probably not explicitly analyze the students’ perception of these elections, but rather relate what conversations we’ve had on the subject to their broader political and historical viewpoints. This is both because I do not have sufficient data on the perceptions of the elections to produce a meaningful analysis, and because what data I do have seems to be compatible with their broader perceptions.

ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMPLES

En presentasjon av noen etnografiske høydepunkt eller empiriske vignetter fra feltnotatene som viser en spesiell hendelse, noe stedtypisk, eller noe av feltets kompleksitet. Dette kan gjerne være empiri som vil inngå i avhandlingen.

The Street Children Project was started by a British couple who have both been affiliated with St. Andrew’s in various ways – as teachers, houseparents and in other functions. It is located in an old residential house in Place 2, a twenty minute drive from St. Andrew’s and caters for children ranging in age from infancy to approximately 16 years. The project houses a small number of street children, but the largest portion of children come to the project for schooling and to get food.

Students from St. Andrew’s Senior School and College (13-18 years) hold classes for the younger children most Saturdays of the year, and that is also when I have visited the project. During these sessions, they typically play with the children for about an hour

outside before they spend about an hour in the classrooms reading from the Bible and doing various exercises (often coloring).

Joining the students to the project and doing interviews with them afterwards allowed me to get an insight into how the students relate to the street children, and in the extension of that, how they see their own social position. One girl, when I asked her why she liked to work at the project, said:

I like to be here because I can help the kids to feel like normal kids and because I want them to feel like they still matter.

The use of the word ‘normal’ is interesting. The way she phrases it, she implies that she is normal which points towards something akin to a middle-class heteronormative upbringing rather than a statistically average upbringing. At the same time, in interviews following the trips to the MSCP, a number of the students reflected on the similarities or differences between themselves and the street children. Most recognized shared humanity and a number mentioned a shared ‘Africanness’, though they unanimously suggested that the differences in upbringing had made themselves and the street children very different. Some contended, when I asked, that they found it difficult to establish true relationships with people this different from themselves, even when they were similarly ages. Others found that the differences made all kinds of interaction difficult because – varyingly – they found that the street children and other poor people were judging of their families and wealth or because the differences in status and knowledge made interaction uncomfortable.

One day late in February, a group of year 10 students were doing geography field trip to Nakuru. They were dropped by a school bus in the center of town and were to walk to the gates of Lake Nakuru National Park – a few kilometers – while they filled out forms and drew a simple map. The students had been divided into several groups of three people, and I walked with several of the groups. For security and supervision, the school bus was set to drive back and forth along the route the students were walking. Part down the way, I walked with three girls when the bus passed us and one remarked: “It is beautiful! It looks more impressive when you’re not on it.”

The name St. Andrew's, Place 1, holds great prestige in Kenya and sending children to this school is a matter of pride for many parents. The number of items with the logo embossed for sale in the school shop and brought by parents for visiting weekends – ranging from sweaters and hats to tennis balls and wine glasses – is testament to the strength of the brand. Comments like the one above – and the term 'ghetto bus' used by the students about one of the older school busses that is not painted with the large logo – reflect a pride in the school on part of many of the students, or at least a pride in being affiliated with it.

Later that same day, when we were close the park, I was walking with a group of three Kenyan boys of whom only one speaks Kiswahili. Some men sitting idly nearby shouted something in Kiswahili in the direction of our group, until one of the men remarked to the others that "You are talking to people who don't even speak Kiswahili."

The issue of languages is given great significance, and a number of the Kenyan St. Andrew's students neither speak the tribal languages of their parents and grandparents, nor Kiswahili. Many of them frame this in a practical perspective – English is more useful for international educations and careers – though others also frame it in a moral perspective. Not speaking any of the Kenyan languages is understood as trying to be *mzungui* and as losing one's culture. I was explained on a number of occasions how poor Africans have 'more' culture than their wealthier counterparts, and I was even told that I would only find 'authentic African activity' if I walked off the school.

A few of my interviews turned towards issues of history and colonialism. In these interviews, the students tended to describe the colonial history in positive terms – as something that came at great personal cost to generations of Africans, but that also sparked the development of modern states on the continent. Once again, the issue of 'Africanness' in their identities comes to a fore. Secondly, they also expressed disapproval of their parents' views on colonialism, which they found to be exceedingly negative and racist. This, along with differences on perception of other topics, reflects generational differences and might be part of a greater historical change in mindset. This

is also where I find generation to be analytically important, though I am not sure of how to develop that analysis further.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Beskrivelse av relevante etiske vurderinger.

My research proposal drew up a number of points with regards to protecting the identities of the students I have been working with. Being young, they constitute a vulnerable group and working with them demands great caution on the part of the researcher. One of my main precautions has been not to note down names with other notes before coming home in the evenings: I have joined names with notes only in a password-protected document on my computer and on paper only in the files I kept in my room. These files rarely contained the last names of the students, but rather first names or nicknames and their year group.

I also worked consciously with my role within the school. Some of this is detailed above, but I also felt it necessary to consider my self-presentation in the light of the school's strict discipline. This was, to my mind, an ethical consideration and not a methodological one (though they are not always neatly separate). I avoided breaking rules that applied to students when within the school, though I stayed with them on a few occasions when they were breaking them. One example of this was playing cards a Sunday afternoon, when most of the students I was with were gambling airtime on their phones. I chose to stay on with them, not to report the issue, but also not to participate in the gambling.