Conflict (im)mobiles : biographies of mobility along the Ubangi River in Central Africa

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Chapter III. Nomadic minds and moving methods

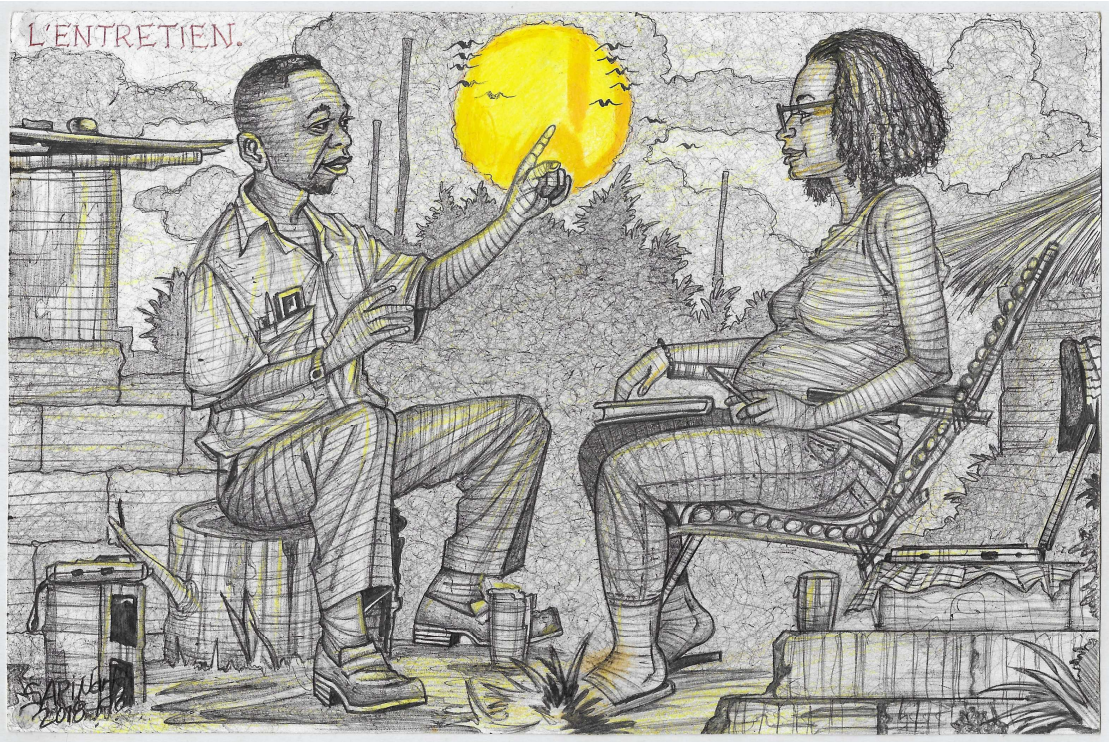

Figure 31 'L'entretien'
Sapin Makengele (2018)

1) Introduction

> Experiences, storytelling, and travelling are interweaved. To experience is to go along a way. (Khosravi 2018)

Whereas in the previous chapter the field and methods employed during fieldwork were presented, this chapter, more than an enumeration of methods (such as interviews, participant observation, and informal conversations), is a reflection on methodology—wherein methodology is understood as an *approach* towards fieldwork, an almost philosophical stance vis-à-vis data collection and the ways in which researchers relate to and work *with* the people they 'research'. In line with Khosravi, in this chapter I look for ways to question and go beyond the North–South division that so often characterizes ethnographic research—a division wherein theory and concepts are produced in the global North, while the global South is reduced to generating empirical data (Khosravi 2018).

Working with a community of conflict (im)mobiles, moreover, has pushed me to espouse a 'nomadic mind' (Hazan and Hertzog 2012; De Bruijn et al. 2017). Characterized by a continual adaptation to a changing world (Marx in Hazan and Hertzog 2012, 1), the nomadic mind resists settling into socially coded, or conventional, modes of thought and behaviour (Braidotti in Hazan and Hertzog 2012, 1). Embracing the nomadic mind is a phenomenological choice that tunes in with a 'rolling with it'

mentality (Thomson, Ansoms and Murison 2013), in which contingency and serendipity are not feared and omitted; on the contrary, they are embraced, valued, and theorized upon (Rivoal and Salazar 2013).

The methods I describe in this chapter do not necessarily differ from those of other researchers. The difference lies in the approach. Participant observation, the ethnographic method *par excellence*, is a point in case. Depending on the balance between participation and observation, one can employ participant observation or *observant participation* (Tedlock 1991; Culhane 2017, 10). Whereas in the former the focus tends towards observation (a very important tool, notwithstanding), in the latter it gravitates around a more bilaterally engaged form of participation. It is not the method itself, but the approach to it that will decide whether one is doing the one or the other. The approach deals also with the ways of observing: is the researcher observing with her eyes only, or is she also registering the environment with other senses, such as taste and smell (Pink 2009; 2011)?

Embracing a nomadic mind is not only about embracing different sites and travelling a part of the methodology—both will be discussed in this chapter—it is about being sensible to other methodological wanderings that instigate an 'opening up' to the senses. Becoming aware of flirting, for instance, opened a door into paying attention to other aspects of fieldwork and other sources of knowledge. Flirting catalysed the phenomenological journey that included sensory and sensuous ethnographic practices (Stoller 1997; Pink 2009)—both in terms of senses and emotions, as well as in experience and intersubjectivity (M. Jackson 1998; Lucht 2012). Flirting, I will argue, was only a door to other emotions, such as fear, frustration, longing, and grief—to name but a few.

Accounting for senses and emotions is not only a reflexive exercise but also 'a route to knowledge' (Pink 2009, 3). In other words, facing and describing the emotions I felt while doing research not only says something about me as a researcher in the field (it certainly does this), but more interestingly it points towards the informants' feelings and sense of belonging. I am hereby not claiming that a researcher can and should experience other people's lives, but reflexivity does facilitate learning about people's ways of knowing (Pink 2011). Researchers enquiring into duress, for example, are confronted with different forms of physical and emotional risks—which need to be expressed and acknowledged (Thomson, Ansoms and Murison 2013), as they facilitate deeper 'scratching of the surface' into the complexities of other people's lives (Khosravi 2018). Empathy is useful not to equate the researcher with the researched, but to reach a better understanding of the lifeworlds of both.

Thus, *moving* methods, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, do not relate only to mobility, but *moving* also encapsulates being emotionally touched (Adey 2009) by the field, the people, and

their stories. Furthermore, it can also be interpreted as *moving towards* others and thus underlines intersubjectivity. In this chapter, therefore, I explore the methodological journey of a nomadic mind. This journey starts with a very concrete and physical interpretation of mobility, in terms of multi-sitedness and travelling between these different sites. Slowly but surely, the physical makes room for a 'wakening up' to the senses (Stoller 1997)—that is, the being-moved-by and moving-towards-one-another approach. A nomadic mind approach thus includes multiple 'others', with whom we conduct research: the informants that inspire our work, the gatekeepers, artists, facilitators and assistants, the friends and acquaintances we make in the field. It also includes the colleagues with whom we work: our supervisors, our fellow PhD students, student assistants, cartographers, language editors and translators, technology experts and filmmakers. A nomadic mind leads to acknowledging all these people, their roles in the process of production of an exceptional fruit: the co-creation knowledge.

2) Mobile methods: Multi-sited ethnography and travelling

Marcus defines multi-sited research as being 'designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites' (Marcus 1995, 105). The researcher needs to make, in other words, the links between the places that would not (necessarily) be linked, by 'following the people' and by paying attention to their life stories (Marcus 1995, 106 and 110). As described in Chapter II, my field of research consisted of at least nine different physical sites in at least five Central African countries (to different degrees, of course). Like Hannerz, I felt I was doing research there … there … and there (2003).

From 2013 to 2015, I visited the multi-sited field four times for a total period of 12 months. After leaving the field (and longest period of field research) in February 2015, I carried out additional follow-up visits in August 2016 and May 2018 to Bangui, as well as in October 2017 to N'Djaména. But the field extended beyond the physical, as discussed in Chapter II, to include the digital sphere. I can say that I was personally 'digitized' by this PhD project. It required me to open Facebook and Twitter accounts and to buy a smartphone. In fact, I bought my first smartphone, a TECHNO, while visiting Inge Ligtvoet, a PhD colleague in Lagos (Nigeria).

Throughout the research, I have kept in contact and followed many of the conflict mobiles through Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. Time and again, especially during crisis peaks, I have turned into a 'phoning anthropologist' (Pelckmans 2009). Up until the time of writing, I keep in contact with several of my informants. With the advent of social media, it has become almost

impossible to disconnect; one continues to follow with one eye what happens on the ground and, almost inadvertently, to collect data. In a way, the field 'persecutes' you, and stopping data collection in the digital age has become a real challenge.

By following conflict mobiles, I became a conflict mobile myself—I also moved because conflict informed my research. More than a means of arriving to potential research sites, the travelling I carried out during my fieldwork became part and parcel of the field itself and, especially, of its methodology—it was 'methodological generative' (Büscher and Urry 2009b, 104). Travelling became a reflection of the movement of people between CAR, DR Congo, and other countries in Central Africa. As we have seen before, in Central Africa mobility is the norm rather than the exception; and travel is part of society and informs social change (De Bruijn and Brinkman 2012). The more I travelled, the more I felt part of a mobile community—that of the road, and that of conflict mobiles. Within my research, travelling as a method was not only a choice, nor merely prescriptive; travel as a method was a consequence of the social realities of my field. I did not embrace mobile methods blindly; I did so because the realities I encountered on the ground required me to do so (Merriman 2014).

In hindsight, I travelled along the same paths as many of my informants, but often in the opposite direction (while I travelled northwards from Kinshasa to Bangui, they went southwards from Bangui to Kinshasa).[92] At times I used the same means of transport they did: the motorbike or the pirogue. At others I made use of more expensive, yet not completely exclusive to refugees, internal and humanitarian flights. Bangui and Kinshasa lie over 1,000 km apart and are not connected by any direct means of transportation. The trip between the two capitals is rather difficult and tedious and can take up to between a week and two months. Travel as a method does not place the experience of the researcher at the forefront. But travelling from Kinshasa to Bangui has helped me to relate to the students-refugees' travel accounts on various levels. For one, it helped me empathize and identify cognitively and intellectually with them (Marcus 1995, 112). Travelling provided me with a 'better understanding' (De Bruijn and Brinkman 2012, 53) of the experiences; the joys and frustrations; the arduousness and required tenacity of trips taken along Equatorial roads; the getting stuck in mud; the back pain and exhaustion after long trips on motorbikes; the unofficial molestations along the road—but also enjoying breathtaking views, for instance.

[92] Except for when some of them decided to return voluntarily, of course.

It must be acknowledged that even if we were travelling on the same roads, the experience and velocity of travelling differed. Travelling made me aware of the inequalities between my informants' and my own means of travel, in terms of different travelling choices (motorbike versus truck), hierarchies and regimes of mobility (international passport versus certificate of refuge). More than empathy, the shared experiences along the road offered me a doorway into engaging with the refugee-student community in Kinshasa. Small talk about our experiences *en route*, or the places we had passed, contributed in reinforcing the credibility of my research in the eyes of the Central African refugees in Kinshasa (Driessen and Jansen 2013). In other words, we had travelled and experienced the same route and therefore we could connect (Büscher and Urry 2009b, 106).

In addition to the movement between cities, the 'walk-along' or 'drive-along' method were also part of the methodology *within* the sites (Kusenbach 2003; Moretti 2017). I here extend the meaning of 'travelling' to include the many walks and rides I conducted with my informants in, for instance, Kinshasa or Bangui. In Chapter II, I described how I discovered Bangui by taking extensive walks with Émile. Such walks were insightful in multiple ways: they brought up relations (and memories) between people and places (Both 2017, 33); they were indicative of the security level of the city (think of the circulation metaphor described for Bangui in Chapter II); and, on a more personal note, they were a way to feel rooted and connected to the city.

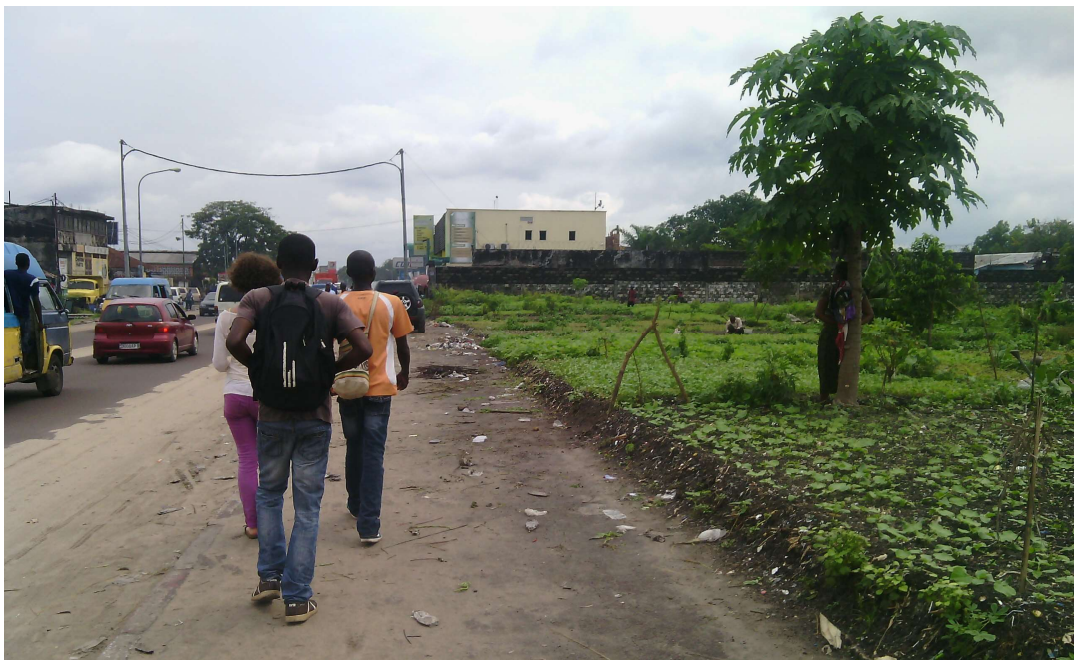

Figure 32 Walking with Max and Tezman
along the Kasa-Vubu cemetery turned urban agricultural field. Photograph taken by Aristo (Kinshasa, 7 May 2014)

In contrast to Bangui, in Kinshasa, where the CAR students did not have as many embodied memories related to places (as they were still new to the city), walks were a way to discover the city together and to see Kinshasa through the foreign eyes of the refugees. I remember a particularly long walk between Limete and Kitambo (see Figure 32 above) in May 2014. As the CAR refugees often complained about the expensive transport, I decided to accompany Max and Tezman on a walk to the CAR embassy, where they wanted to apply for a *laisser-passer* (see Chapter V). During our walk, we crossed five *communes* of Kinshasa—Limete, Kalamu, Ngiri-Ngiri, Bandalungwa, and Kitambo (see Figure 26)—and the walk took us several hours along busy streets under a burning sun. It was insightful, but equally exhausting, even though I am accustomed to walking a lot. At the end of that day, I went to bed with a backache. Sharing mobile experiences taught me something about the daily hardships. This walk was reminiscent of the back pain felt after travelling eight hours on dusty roads on the back of a motorbike. Both are indicative of the hardships endured when having to travel along roads on a regular basis—either in terms of the state of the road, as in the countryside, or in terms of the expensive public transport, as in the city.[93] While walking in Kinshasa was a choice for the researcher, it was less so for the refugee-students, who could not always afford to pay transport fees.

One of the things that really attracted me to 'talking whilst walking' (Anderson 2004) was the intimate public space for discussion that these walks created. As Both rightly suggests, not sitting together face to face triggered other kinds of informal conversations and made interlocutors less (or perhaps differently) conscious of what they were sharing (Both 2017, 34). Walking together, side by side, and especially riding on a motorbike together—a 'ride-along' method, sitting one behind the other, as I often did with Euloge in Kinshasa, or during the long motorbike trips in Sud-Ubangi—opened up a space for conversation. I would even argue that this space elicited confessions and the sharing of doubts and reflections, not only on the side of the informants, but also on my own side. Issues about mistrust, secretiveness, and the purpose of my research, for instance, often came up during such walks (see also 4.a hereunder).

[93] Even though it must be noted that the state of the streets in Kinshasa is often deplorable too.

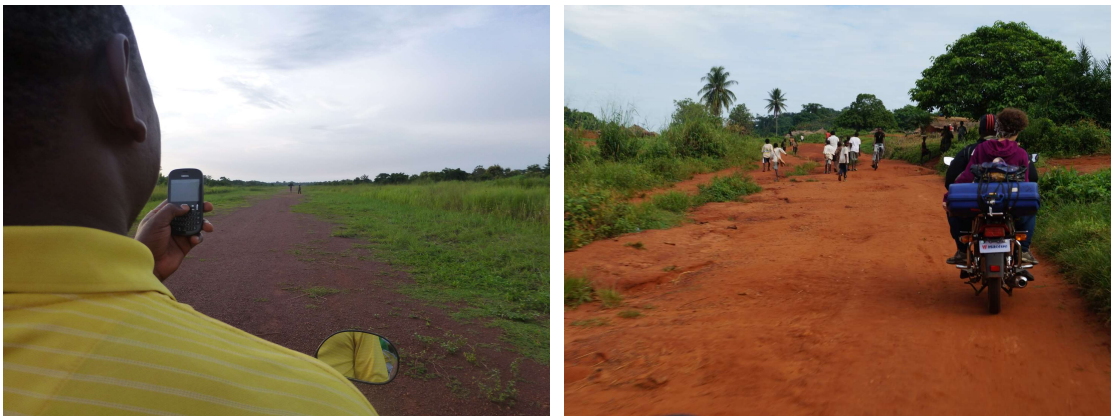

Figure 33 The ride-along method
(Left) Sitting on the back of the motorbike while riding the landing lane of Libenge's airport with Frère Georges (20 July 2013). (Right) An intimate moving public space on the road between Gemena and Libenge (Photographed by Mirjam de Bruijn, 10 June 2014). It is interesting to note that as I look at the pictures, I can clearly remember what we were discussing on that particular day

I nevertheless felt a doubleness, on repeated occasions, when spending time with Centrafricains in Kinshasa: was my field CAR or Congo? Using the metaphor of the school atlas, Malkki explains how places seem to be rooted, with clear-cut delimitations, so that 'one country cannot at the same time be another country' (Malkki 1992, 26). In reality a country *can* be within another country, and two sites can overlap in one geographical location. This was the case when I hung around the CAR students in Kinshasa and we would greet one another in Sango and eat *koko*[94] together while locating streets on a mental map of Bangui. I was simultaneously in both cities. While sitting physically in Kinshasa, we would talk about Bangui in terms of past anecdotes, recent political developments, and the future plans to rebuild the country. Bangui turned into a melancholic image of what they had left behind.

The more time I spent among the Central African refugee-students in Kinshasa, the fuzzier the division between the two sites became: Centrafricain informants would meet Congolese friends; Congolese friends would comment upon my research about the refugees; and Centrafricains learned Lingala. While trying to understand the Central African refugees in Congo, it was as if two apparent 'worlds apart' (Marcus 1995, 102) melted into one another before my eyes. While the Banguissois in Kinshasa imagined Bangui, they also adapted to and integrated their environment into their processes of identification and sense of belonging (see Chapter VI). In multi-sited ethnography, therefore, the multiple sites do not point strictly to physical locations. Remembered and invented homes and imagined homelands count as sites too (Gupta and Ferguson 1992b; Malkki 1992, 24).

[94] A green leaf found in Central Africa

Going to Bangui for follow-up visits, respectively a year-and-a-half and three years after leaving Kinshasa in 2015, was also an exercise in multi-sitedness. During both visits (August 2016 and May 2018), the experience was reversed; and encountering Kinshasa *in* Bangui, as in the memories of the returned refugees, proved to be equally insightful. These visits gave me the opportunity to extend the following strategy even further. While, on the one hand, I was able to catch up and reconnect with those refugees who had returned to the country of origin, on the other hand, I was also able to strengthen the connections with those who were still in Kinshasa, as they eagerly provided me with the contact details of their friends and family members and encouraged me to visit them. During the follow-up visits I was in close contact, through social media, with the refugees in Kinshasa and would send them pictures of their parents and siblings. The follow-up visits, moreover, made me even more credible and trustworthy, a researcher who makes the effort.

Regarding the collection of data, these visits highlighted the gaps, and they gave meaning to the silences and omissions in our conversations in Kinshasa. Not everything can be shared through speech; some things one needs to see for oneself. The longer I stayed in Bangui, the more I learned about the refugees. I learned, for instance, that Le Firmin had a young daughter he had never seen, as he had left before her birth, but whose mother was in good contact with Le Firmin's sibling. Or that Francis was married and his father a *chef de quartier* (both Le Firmin and Francis will be discussed in the empirical section). The family members of the refugees would receive me at times warmly, at other times with apprehension. In both cases it was instructive.

3) Opening up to senses and emotions

In his book *After Method* (2004), John Law describes different types of knowledge. In the social sciences, he argues, the primacy of cognitive knowledge seems to reign above other types of knowledge. Even if Law does not want to dismiss the importance of cognitive knowledge and its accompanying, perhaps more positivistic, methods, he nevertheless underlines that focusing only on this type of knowledge is incomplete. There are other ways of knowing the world:

> We will need to teach ourselves to know some of the realities of the world using methods unusual to or unknown in social science. … Here are some possibilities. Perhaps we will need to know them [the realities] through the hungers, tastes, discomforts, or pains of our bodies. These would be forms of knowing as embodiment. Perhaps we will need to know them through 'private' emotions that open us to worlds of sensibilities, passions, intuitions, fears and betrayals. These would be forms of knowing as emotionality or apprehension. Perhaps… (Law 2004, 3)

… And so he goes on to describe forms of knowing linked to 'deliberate imprecision', 'situated inquiry', and more. The point is that cognitive knowing is incomplete and cannot encompass all knowledge; there is room needed for other types of knowledge in order to better understand the world we live in. 'My aim is to broaden method,' he writes, 'to subvert it, but also to remake it' (Law 2004, 9).

Since '[r]esearch is a series of positive and negative emotions that will be experienced daily' (Thomson, Ansoms and Murison 2013, 3), it appears that more and more researchers advocate for the integration of emotions and imagination into ethnography. Culhane, for instance, invites us to defy the hierarchy of the five senses, wherein sight is the privileged one, and to take seriously into consideration the other senses: sound, taste, smell, and touch (Culhane 2017, 11). She invites us, furthermore, to expand the five senses so as to include emotions, especially considering that the line between senses and emotions is often blurred. Think for instance of feelings of belonging and exclusion, or imagination. In my writing, I struggle at times to differentiate sense from sentiment (feeling). Touching and hearing relate to the senses; fear and frustration are sentiments. But what about attraction or intuition? Can the latter pair also be operationalized as tools of analysis?

a) From Bangui 'la coquette' to Bangui 'la roquette'

One of the first emotions/senses I started experiencing and experimenting with in the field was attraction, which would translate itself into 'practices' of flirting. Going over my notes and observations, descriptions of innocent 'flirting' caught my attention on more than one occasion. I grew to understand my flirtatious attitude, firstly, as a tactic to deal with the practicalities of a challenging and mobile field setting. I realized I flirted to gain access to places and to people, but also for a whole bunch of administrative procedures: to facilitate the crossing of international borders, to avoid paying fees along the road, and so on. In these instances, flirting was always accompanied by language. Being fluent in Lingala and having a smattering of Sango and Swahili helped me to work my way through different checkpoints and bargain on improvised fees. Language protected me in a way; I felt I was less easily taken advantage from. This would later also instruct me in understanding the difficulties that the CAR refugee-students must have experienced when dealing with Congolese government officials (see Chapter V).

However, this practical explanation soon became unsatisfactory; I felt, in other words, that there was more to flirting. Was it perhaps indicative of my cognitive attraction towards the topic of research? Or to my position in the field? The provocative chapter by Altork in a handbook on ethnographic fieldwork, 'Walking the Fire Line: The Erotic Dimension of the Fieldwork Experience' (Altork 2006),

triggered something in me: 'an opening of one's being to the world' (Stoller 1997, xviii). Flirting prompted me to think of myself as a researcher with a need to experiment with the senses; it encouraged me to 'open up'. More than the act itself, or a catalyst for tedious administrative procedures, flirting made me aware of how I stood in the field. Taking into consideration that the ethnographer's best and worst tool is the ethnographer herself, flirting helped me to reflect on the use of myself and my body, my senses and my emotions, in the field. It activated my mind to use other senses and emotions as paths towards knowledge.

Soon afterward, flirting was pushed into the background. I started to dream about my field during research, and on more than one occasion my dreams left me with a feeling of anxiety and fear. The title of this sub-section reflects the shift from flirting to fear. In the 1970s, Bangui, as if impersonating a beautiful lady, came to be known as *Bangui la coquette*—the flirtatious; since the recent crisis, the city became known as *Bangui la roque*tte—the rocket. Two episodes come to mind: the first was an accident that took place during a walk in Bangui in August 2013 (as described before in Chapter II); the second took place during the anti-Kabila riots in Kinshasa in January 2015. But, more banally, many of my anxieties also dealt with travelling along new and challenging roads. In dealing with fear, as with other emotions, I have chosen to take a phenomenological approach. There is no stark separation between the feeling of fear felt by the informants and researcher. Even if one cannot equate both feelings—the researcher's experience of extreme emotions is just the tip of the iceberg compared with what our research subjects feel every day (Begley in Thomson, Ansoms and Murison 2013, 6; see also Khosravi 2018)—the former is nevertheless informative of the latter and can lead to an understanding of the daily living experiences and hardships.

During fieldwork, therefore, I observed that when faced with fear there are some who become paranoid and mistrust everyone, while others prefer to (force themselves to) remain calm and keep to the daily routines so as to remain sane—and yet others flaunt their heroic nonchalance while drinking themselves numb. Fear can ignite complete abjection, but it can also ignite the opposite: curiosity. The night I first heard clear shootings in Bangui, at a distance, I took to sweeping my room. This incident is remembered as a joke; in times of conflict, humour also seems to play a vital role (van Roekel 2016).

Anger and frustration are other 'feelings' of note. On several occasions, I wrote about my frustration vis-à-vis the humanitarian presence, and their bubble, in the field. I am not alone; writing about Libenge, Jourdan even refers to the attitude of many of these organizations as one that carries traces of colonial times (2013). On one occasion, I felt publicly belittled in the premises of the UNHCR in

Libenge, where I had naively trespassed the boundaries between those who belonged to the humanitarian world and those who do not. I was soon put in my place. Feeling excluded on that day helped me emotionally understand what the inhabitants of Libenge must feel on a regular basis (Law 2004, 3–4; Culhane 2017, 11). I was able to share this anger and frustration, even if just the tip of the iceberg, with my informants, which Max expresses in the following lines:

> And yes, the principle is simple: no crisis, no UN mission. We must therefore maintain the crisis to keep this cursed system alive. Because we eat there, we screw there, we kill there, we rape there. That's life and it's too bad for the victims. They will find themselves in hell 'another day', but above all they must live on Central African blood. (M.-L. Kassaï in preparation)

The accusations Max makes towards the UN missions in this excerpt may seem harsh, biased, the result of personal frustration—yet they are not based on nothing.[95] My purpose in sharing his insights and that of others is to bring out the voices of those who are supposed to benefit from these agencies' actions, as well as to point out the inequalities between the two. It is part of the asymmetry of the world: the actors within humanitarian agencies have more voice, are more easily heard, than the silenced (supposed) benefiters—even if, were it not for the latter, the former would be out of work.

Finally, I would like to point out that in my fieldwork notes I have devoted many lines to the description of atmospheres: sunsets, colours, and energy flows. These excerpts are not only enjoyable to read, they also bring me back to the field and help me remember the context of research in more detail (just as visuals do). Through the use of humour and flowery language (Sand-Jensen 2007), these atmosphere descriptions evoke something beyond ideas and concepts: they give the reader the taste of ethnographic things (Altork 2006) and tell it 'as it is' (Thomson, Ansoms and Murison 2013). Mixing head and heart (Stoller 1997, xviii), opening up to the senses, leads to data that add to the data collected through the more standardized participant observation or interview methods; such mixing can foster triangulation. Utilizing the senses is a 'critical methodology' (Pink 2009), a way of looking at method and being in the field.

[95] There have been different sexual scandals (also with minors) involving peacekeeping missions in CAR. The perpetrators are both African and European. One of the most shocking examples was the child abuse by French troops as reported by the UN whistleblower Andre Kompass (Laville 2015; 2016). It exposed not only the abuses themselves, but also the culture of silence that is practised within the UN.

b) Visuals

The use of the numerous photographs, maps (even the one created in collaboration with a cartographer), and works of art (paintings and drawings) fits very well in an ethnography that opens up to the senses. Visuals are not only complementary to the (written or oral) text; photographs, like fieldwork notes, are attempts at capturing moments, atmospheres, and intersubjective situations as researchers experience them. They depict an interpretation of concrete situations (Kusk 2018, 111). Sometimes, visuals add to the written text; other times, they can evoke something completely different. In any case, they are more than just an illustration of the text.

The use of visuals, furthermore, impacts one's way of doing fieldwork. The felt presence of the camera during filming and taking photographs can be, at times, pleasant, but also disturbing at other times. It can elicit curiosity or aversion. Visuals can also be used to connect and to stimulate people to talk. I remember, for instance, one day chatting in the kitchen with Papa Michel, the cook of a compound where I was staying. As he started telling me about his trips in the Ubangi region during times of rebellion in the early 2000s, exchanging salt and soap for eggs, I brought out a map to follow his wanderings with my finger. It was as if the map triggered his talking even more, reading the names of small towns prompted memories but also smiles.[96] I had a prop in hand through which I could relate differently to him, break the ice, narrow the distance between researcher and informant and, eventually, elicit new and unexpected information.

Back at home, visuals change how the researcher comes to grips with the data collected (MacDougall 1998; Boudreault-Fournier 2017). They are powerful tools to remember the context in more detail, but also what was said during conversations. In the last month of my fieldwork, Sjoerd Sijsma, a Dutch ethnographic filmmaker who is part of the CTD research project, visited the field of research in Kinshasa. The purpose of this trip was to meet and film the refugee-students with whom I had worked for months. As it took place at the end of my research, the CAR refugee-students were open to the filming—in fact, overwhelmed by Sjoerd's improvised yet fully equipped studio, it even added a layer of credibility and professionalism to my research, at least in the eyes of the CAR refugee-students. His visit resulted concretely in beautiful photographs, and two videos which have been published online (Wilson and Sijsma 2015; 2016). Moreover, working with (moving) images has pushed me to analyse the stories of the CAR refugees differently and to find new links and connections (for a concrete example, see Figure 34). In addition, it motivated me to walk down the path of co-creation. The video we edited on the making of the featured single, *'On a du mal*' (Wilson

[96] Fieldwork notes 14 August 2013

and Sijsma 2015), reinforced our friendship with Esatis, a CAR refugee slam poet, whom we would later meet in N'Djaména 2017 (see also Chapter VIII).

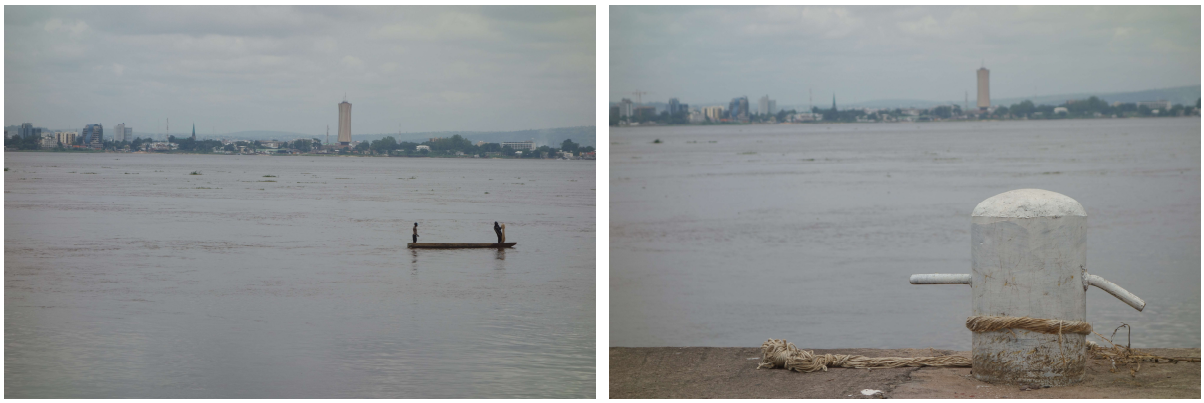

Figure 34 The two towers
Seeing things differently: One tower, two towers, as pointed out by Sjoerd Sijsma. Photographs on the shores of the Congo River in Kinshasa, looking at Brazzaville's iconic Nabemba tower while standing next to a buoy (Photographs by Sjoerd Sijsma, 4 February 2015)

c) Painting performance

By far the most 'revolutionizing' visual method we employed during fieldwork (and I write 'we' because it was a joint endeavour in collaborative ethnography) was the ten days' long painting performance based on the life story of Papa Henri, that Sapin Makengele and I carried out in January 2015 in Libenge. Despite having started as a little side project, Papa Henri's project turned out to be the cherry on top of my experience in the field. A painting performance is one or several public life painting sessions in front of a group of passers-by (often outdoors), who, attracted by the painting scene, end up forming a semicircle around the painter. The canvas on which the painter works metamorphoses into a medium of communication and exchange and thus also a tool of research. Through brush strokes, the artist elicits thoughts, provokes reactions from the public, and triggers conversation. When used as a tool of research, the painting performance offers the researcher the opportunity to observe reactions and interactions, record comments, and eventually give additional explanations to the public on the sidelines. The exchange is multilateral: new connections between topics and people are made, ideas go back and forth among the participants, and some even materialize in painted details on the canvas. (For a more detailed description, see Makengele and Wilson in preparation).

Based on Papa Henri Azunda's life story, the painting performance in Libenge brought about different results. Some were very concrete, others more abstract. For one, it resulted in two paintings (see Figure 35), one of which stayed with Papa Henri, while the other travelled to Kinshasa and eventually made it to the Netherlands, where it has been exhibited twice up to the date of writing. In addition

to the paintings, there was a locally made easel, two repainted school street signs, a lecture for the students at the ISP,[97] and a jointly written book chapter (Makengele and Wilson in preparation). Secondly, it is hoped that the performance itself—a social product of exchange, one that existed *in situ*—lingers in the memories and the stories of those who witnessed it. Finally, it was a lesson in co-creation—that is, the joint production of knowledge, a concrete example of how one can 'reinvent a classroom without walls in which artists, participants of the research, public and researchers are all co-learners' (Mbembe, 2015).

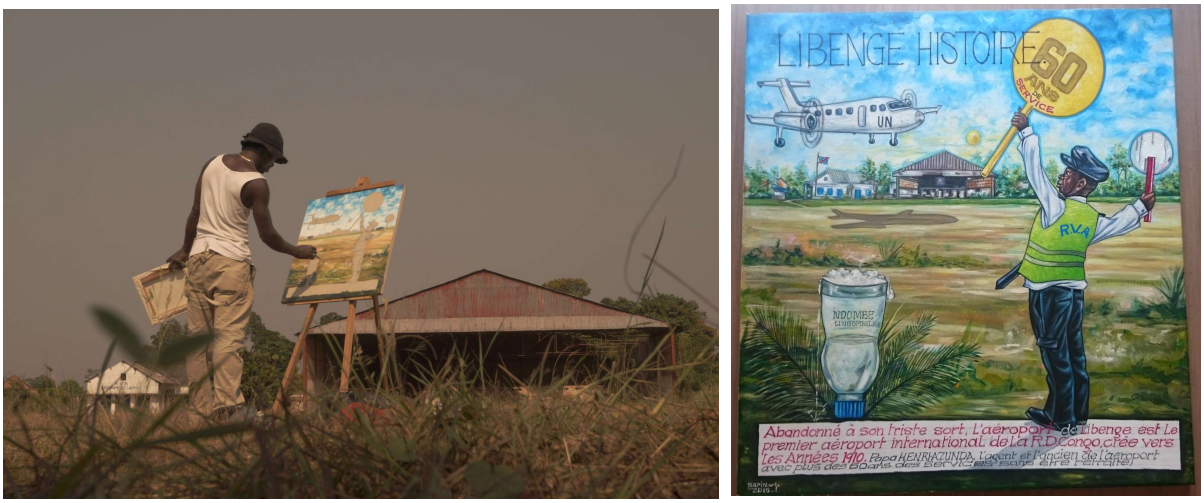

Figure 35 Painting performance Libenge Histoire
(Left) Second day of the painting performance at the landing runway of the Libenge Airport (1 January 2015). (Right) The painting that resulted from the performance 'Libenge Histoire' (Makengele 2015b). In the caption at the bottom, the following text is written: 'Abandoned to its fate, the Libenge Airport is the first international airport in the DR Congo, it was created around 1910. Papa Henri Azunda is an agent and former airport manager with more than 60 years of service and has not yet retired!'

Barber argues that, for historians, new popular cultural forms have double lives; they are objects of historical inquiry and also among its (unique) sources (Barber 2018, 3). Likewise, the painting performance encouraged me to look at popular art as more than a complement to text, or an illustration; art is the result of the production of knowledge, worthy of historical inquiry. But I would like to add a 'third life' to the cultural forms. Also methodologically speaking, these forms can be used as powerful tools of research and exchange. It is through this triple lens that the use of the images, paintings, photographs, poems, and excerpts of a novel included in this thesis must be understood. They should be read as objects of historical inquiry, sources and tools of research. They playfully reverse the role of artists to that of researchers and of researchers to that of artists, in a joint venture to create knowledge. In this light, Tshibumba, a Congolese popular painter from

[97] Institute Supérieur Pédagogique—in other words, an institution for higher education

Lubumbashi, who worked together with a European historian in the 1970s, saw himself not only as an artist, but also as an historian:

> I tell things through painting. That is to say, through painting I show how events happened, right? I don't write but I bring ideas, I show how a certain event happened. In a way, I am producing a monument. (Tshibumba in Fabian 1996, 14)

Tshibumba's words resonate in the observation made by one of the Libengesois students mentioned above who, when asked to reflect on the method of the painting performance in contrast to other methods, responded :

> Painting materializes what speech expresses ephemerally. Words are carried away, but that which is written (painted) is kept. (Titi, January 2015)[98]

The use of visuals as a tool of collaboration and joint research will be further discussed at the end of this chapter. But before going into the details of how to work together, there are some ethical considerations, including trust, that need to be discussed first.

4) Gaining trust

a) 'Bê ti mo a de awè?'

> Lucky is the researcher who stumbles upon a lying informant. (Van der Geest 2010, 102)

Even if the researcher 'opens up' to the field, access to data is thereby not assured. In ethnography the researcher works together with other people, and thus there is more to doing fieldwork than just opening up. In fact, you are not only dependent on yourself as a tool, but you are also dependent on the openness and willingness of others. Trust plays herein a pivotal role. It is in this context that ethnographers must utilize one of the instruments they (still?) have and that journalists, for instance, do not: time. In their book about the challenges of doing fieldwork in Africa, Thomson et al. write:

> Why would anyone divulge sensitive information, that if known beyond the confines of your interview could get them into trouble with neighbours and local authorities alike? This is why building trust takes time. It cannot be instantly gained. We must demonstrate that we can be

[98] Questionnaire handed out to the students of the ISP Libenge after an interactive class, January 2015. Translated from French: *Bref, on peut conclure que la peinture est le monument de la parole. Elle matérialise en concrétisant ce que la parole exprime par l'air, volatif comme on a dit tantôt: La parole s'en va mais les écrits (peintures) restent.*

> trusted, that we respect our research subject, and that we have a genuine interest in their lives and livelihoods (Thomson, Ansoms and Murison 2013, 6).

It takes time to build up relationships based on mutual trust and respect. It takes time to talk about sensitive issues. It takes time to understand and to analyse them. In 'A manifesto for live methods', Back and Puwar advocate for slow academia, where the researcher has the possibility and the room to 'take time, think carefully and slowly' (Back and Puwar 2013).

In the next couple of paragraphs, I would like to discuss and shed some light on the issue of trust by describing my relationship with the group of CAR students in Kinshasa that form the core of this thesis. Regarding trust, there were, one can say, roughly two types of refugee among the students. On the one hand, there were those who seemed to trust me and were fairly open to my presence and my questions; and, on the other, there were those who were more apprehensive, both in explicit and less explicit ways.

To the researcher, her presence in the field seems logical; it is taken for granted as it were: at the end of the day, this is what we do. For those living in the field, however, the sudden presence of someone who asks a lot of questions, some very intimate ones, may be a source of suspicion. Some of the Central African refugees were intrigued by and wary of my presence. It is indeed strange that a white lady tries to speak the local language and knows the places one has been. I remember one day meeting a Central African refugee who used to travel back and forth to Cameroon. He had heard me exchanging with his friends in the very basic Sango I knew. He told me he was Fulani and started boasting about Douala to his friends. He mentioned a famous roundabout. His hyperactivity triggered me and thus I greeted him in Fulfulde (using a couple of words I had learned during a fieldtrip to Cameroon the month before). I then showed him a picture I had taken with my phone of the roundabout he was talking about. This young man was simply flabbergasted. When thinking back over this episode, I must admit that I even consider myself to have been suspicious!

It took me a long time and conscious efforts to gain the trust of the refugees. My relationship with the refugee described in the episode above was one of those relationships completely enveloped by mistrust, yet I could not help feeling drawn to his story and his performance. Who was this man? The mistrust I felt seemed to trigger me and we kept in contact until the end of my fieldwork. This young man was not the only person who would carefully observe my movements and behaviour; he was just the most conspicuous person to do so. In fact, rumour had it that my case 'was discussed' in the group. Le Firmin was a case in point too. As a university student, on the one hand, he was eager to talk to me; but, on the other hand, he preferred to keep his distance. We spent many hours talking

about my research, and I explained him over and over again the reason for my long stay in Kinshasa and how I came to meet them. But he just did not seem convinced by it.

Time had its effects and the ice started melting slowly. There was a small incident that marked a change when, on one occasion, feeling tired because of the heat and rain, I asked the group of students if I could have a short nap. This trivial question, and the fact that I did lie down for half an hour, loosened something up in the group. I think it is because I was acting 'normal'; I was showing my vulnerability, like any other tired human being.[99]

When my supervisor, Mirjam de Bruijn, came to visit me in the field in June 2014 and I 'officially' introduced her to the group of CAR refugees, it changed my relation with most of them positively. I was credibly linked to a university; my professor was a proof of it, and thus my research gained more 'weight'. The first night my supervisor met the refugees, we even interviewed and filmed them! Until that day I had tried to record an interview with Le Firmin, but it had never worked out because he just did not trust me enough. The first time he agreed to be interviewed, for instance, he ended by blowing it off. Sitting in front of the camera at my studio, he commented: 'Why do you ask me the same questions as those who work for the UNHCR?' I could just as well be a spy for the UNHCR! I dropped the interview, frustrated. Researchers working with refugees have documented the latter's mistrust towards humanitarians and, by extension, towards researchers since the 1980s (Harrell-Bond, Voutira and Leopold 1992; Malkki 1995, 48). Looking back at this particular incident, Le Firmin's unwillingness, doubt, and distrust taught me that I was experiencing what researchers experience when confronted by 'lying informants' faces: discomfort and confusion (Berckmoes 2013). However, and especially considering the challenging situation in which refugees find themselves, it pointed exactly to the core of my research—in terms of the duress, uncertainty, and violence experienced by the refugees.

On the day that I visited the students in their compound with Mirjam, however, Le Firmin opened up. After the interview he asked me teasingly in Sango: '*Bê ti mo a de awè?*' (lit. 'Has your heart cooled down?'). Yes, my heart was appeased, and so was theirs. It took me a long time, however, to understand the meaning of the mistrust–appeasement–trust continuum (a theme I will further discuss in Chapter VII). The fact is that the visit of my supervisor reassured the refugees and contributed to building our relationship of trust. It demonstrated, to paraphrase Thomson, Ansoms

[99] Fieldwork notes

and Murison, that I could be trusted, that I respected them, and that I had a genuine interest in their lives and livelihoods (2013, 6).

Going back to Europe for the summer break, in order to pick up my daughter, proved to be more effective, in terms of trust, than staying for a long and continuous period. Returning to the field showed commitment and an interest in following-up (*suivi*). It is precisely the lack of this vital *suivi* they so much criticize vis-à-vis humanitarian agencies. By following them, I was doing something the refugees requested from the humanitarian agencies: they were being heard. Thus, I had come back with my almost four-year-old daughter; and even if her presence was not directly linked to how I conducted research, it did say something about the way I stood in the field (Brown and Dreby 2013). How can one gather so much personal information about the other without sharing one's own? By bringing my daughter along I shared some of my personal information, beyond the mask of the ethnographer. Showing a piece of one's humanity makes one more human and thus, I would argue, more credible to others. But it also makes one more vulnerable; not without reason, Eriksen writes that 'fieldwork is extremely demanding, both in professional and in human terms' (Eriksen 2010, 28).

Having my daughter by my side influenced my mobility patterns. It was as if, instead going *into* the field, in terms of moving around the city, the field started coming *towards* me. During the month and a half Erikah was with me, I received a lot of visitors in my little studio. I look back at this period with a mixture of nostalgia and romanticism. Being there with her 'grounded' me to the compound, positively in hindsight, and it gave me roots. I may have roamed less around the city, but people always knew where to find me. In September 2014, I was forced to leave the field unexpectedly. After a six-week break, I had gone back to Kinshasa without my daughter, but pregnant with my second baby. Again, I cannot say for a fact that pregnancy gave more credibility, but some people started treating me differently, and I definitely started frequenting places I had never visited before—such as maternity clinics for routine checkups. The pregnancy was again a proof of my human side; many were surprised to see a white woman with a big belly, especially in the countryside. Building a relationship of trust is also about sharing your life, and a protruding belly did not stand in the way.

b) Ethical considerations

Next to (winning) trust, there are many other ethical considerations that should be discussed in relation to ethnographic fieldwork. I have chosen to touch upon two: (1) anonymity and the use of pseudonyms, and (2) engagement and acknowledgement of the joint effort. Regarding the former, there is no one-size-fits-all answer regarding the issue of anonymity. In fact, the use of pseudonyms

depends on the field and topic of research. In some cases, pseudonyms are an absolute necessity, while in other cases, withholding the identity of an individual can be rude and belittling. This is the case for artists, politicians, and other public figures, for instance, for whom fame (being known), is linked to their professional identity and success. In this thesis, I applied different rules to different people, the reasoning for which I will now set out. In most cases, I asked the informants with whom I worked about their wishes. Their agreement to participate is not written down as a formal consent but based on a relationship of trust. I respect their choices with regards to anonymity, even if it sometimes poses a challenge in the digital age in which people expose their lives on social media. Many of my informants have chosen their own pseudonyms. Those who appear in photographs are either unrecognizable or unidentified, and they personally agreed to have the photographs taken. Regarding the informants who explicitly forbade me to use their names, I have made them as vague as possible.

Artists are called by their artist name, especially if they do the same in their publications or performances. In relation to the elderly, on the other hand, I have chosen to take a different approach. In DR Congo, for instance, there is a tradition of name-dropping (or *kobwaka libanga* in Lingala),[100] very present in popular music (White 2008, 170; see also Trapido 2010; Tsambu 2015; the latter for a visual interpretation), but also in other cultural expressions , such as TV and radio shows, and even in popular painting (Makengele 2011). In addition to being a sign of reciprocity or of patrimonial relationships, name-dropping is illustrative of respect and consideration. People have often asked me during informal conversations, jokingly, whether I would 'drop' their names in my thesis. Considering the latter, I have taken the liberty to use the real names of some of the informants mentioned herein. For instance, Papa Henri—his story needs to be told and given a name; anonymity would not serve this purpose.

As Western researchers we take a lot away from our informants and the field in general—such as images, objects, and life stories. Even if ethnographers who work with qualitative methods sometimes claim to be the voice of the voiceless, sharing the stories of our informants often benefits the researcher more (in terms of pursuing a professional career) than it does the sources of these stories. There are different issues at play. The first relates to engagement, at times choosing sides

[100] Literally throwing stones. 'This expression is also used to describe young children who throw pebbles at parents in an attempt to attract their attention or provoke a response. Throwing pebbles, both literally and figuratively, can be a way of getting attention, affection, or material support' (White 2008, 170; see also Wilson 2012, 131–32).

(Scheper-Hughes 1995; Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006), as well as to reciprocity: what we can give back to the field in material and non-material terms. The second touches upon giving back in terms of acknowledging the informants in the production of knowledge. It deals, in other words, with epistemological issues in the hierarchical institution of knowledge *par excellence*: the university.

Reciprocity, as Krause suggests, refers to mutual benefits of research projects for both participants and researchers—in other words, 'in return for their help, those studied must also be helped' (Krause 2017a, 15). Academic publications might not be the most useful form of reciprocity; they often take a long time to publish, and the final product is not always accessible to all (in terms of jargon and language, for instance, but also in terms of open access issues). Yet, feedback to the field is important, and the researcher can think of other more personal or virtual ways of disseminating results—for instance, group discussions, sending reports via e-mail, personal exchange and keeping in touch (Krause 2017a, 25), but also setting up (long-term) projects together (Willson 2007; Van Damme 2013) and looking for alternative ways to publish, such as short films, travelling exhibitions, and more. 'Our job is to *correspond* with those among whom we have worked,' Ingold argues, 'not to speak for them' (Ingold 2017, 21; italics in original).

In the initial design of my research, there was a budget allocated for a short dissemination trip in order to hold a workshop with the informants in the field. Unfortunately, until the date of writing, this trip has not taken place owing to time constraints. On the other hand, in a field characterized by mobility, it must be noted that many of the refugees have moved elsewhere. I did try to share the problematics of urban refugees in Africa, however, through different channels to a wider public: radio and written press (Jonkman 2015), different guest seminars (SIB Utrecht 2014; UN Humanity House 2015; Africa students community 2017; Wilson 2018c), the 'Rumours on the Ubangui' personal blog,[101] two short films accessible online (Wilson and Sijsma 2015, 2016)—as well as through the final conference of Connecting in Times of Duress, which will be discussed in the following section. Together with two academic articles, I have shared these activities on my Facebook wall, and in private chat conversations through which I have kept in touch with many of my informants until the time of writing.

Acknowledgement of the role of the informants in the production of knowledge is in a way an extension of reciprocity, but, as we will see hereunder, its scope goes well beyond the relationship

[101] http://rumoursontheubangui.tumblr.com/

between researcher and researched (and also beyond the involvement of potential stakeholders such as NGOs).

5) Producing knowledge together: Co-creation

> Researchers only find themselves in a truly dominant position above participants if collaborations are not acknowledged. (Krause 2017a, 15)

In terms of acknowledgement, two important methodological processes were taking place simultaneously during fieldwork. In hindsight, I can say they were intimately linked. The first process entails the painting performance discussed above. The second is related to the ways, facilitated through art, in which we grew closer towards the end of fieldwork, and also thereafter. Because I feel that were it not for Sapin's painting performance, I would never have experimented with co-creation, I will begin by acknowledging the role of artists in the creation of knowledge. Without words, without a concrete explanation in cognitive terms, Sapin introduced me to a wonderful, open-ended but also challenging methodological journey. He triggered my mind and 'revolutionized' me to think beyond writing as the only semiotic system through which knowledge can be collected and communicated (Wilson 2015d). I will then turn to other co-creators, in particular the urban refugees, and my colleagues. I will round up this section by looking at the meaning of acknowledgement in the production of knowledge by non-academic actors and its place within the epistemological practices of the university.

a) Acknowledging the researched as researcher

In addition to Sapin's previous personal experience with working with researchers (Michel 2013; Makengele and Wilson in preparation), another very inspiring example of co-creation is the work of the historian Johannes Fabian—and, in particular, Fabian's collaboration with the Congolese painter Tshibumba. This collaboration resulted, among others, in the book *Remembering the Present,* a work that combines illustrated paintings, interviews, and academic essays. Published more than two decades after Tshibumba and Fabian last met, the foreword to the book particularly caught my attention. In it Fabian writes:

> To acknowledge debts to Tshibumba Kanda Matulu by expressing the usual gratitude to him as my 'informant' would be inappropriate. The briefest glance at our relationship, as evidenced in the texts presented here, shows that we were engaged in a common task. To the extent possible under the economic and political circumstances, we owed each other. It is thus all the more saddening that Tshibumba could not take part in the completion of our project. (Fabian 1996, xiv)

In line with Fabian, I advocate for the research participant (in this case an artist) as a creator of knowledge, rather than a gatekeeper to facts and stories. The challenge in co-creation lies in 'acknowledg[ing] "Others" as thinking and knowledge-producing subjects' (Mbembe 2015). Just like Tshibumba and Fabian, Sapin and I in Libenge were engaged in a common task. In another article, Fabian argues that ethnographic knowledge demands recognition, a kind of acknowledgement that must be given to human beings who are subjected to inquiries (Fabian 1999, 50).[102] I am inspired by the reading of recognition as an act of acknowledgement, one that gives people 'the recognition they ask for and deserve' (Fabian 1999, 53). Like communication, the act of recognition is mutual. It is not 'something that one party can simply grant the other' (Fabian 1999, 66), but it rather happens both ways.

By bringing back the known and the knower into contact, to use Mbembe's words, recognition is able to transform them both (Mbembe 2015; Fabian 1999). Acknowledgement then takes place in different steps. One of the first steps is to recognize, name, acknowledge, discuss, and problematize the asymmetrical relationship between the researcher, who usually is from the global North, and her subject of study, oftentimes from the global South (Khosravi 2018). The former is funded by a Western university; the latter has to fend for him- or herself. Even if it is not entirely possible to prevent power asymmetries, the researcher should try to alleviate top-down hierarchies (Krause 2017b).

Basing himself on Geertz, Khosravi rightly claims that researchers cannot live migrants' lives (nor refugees' lives for that matter). Thus, instead of objectifying them and creating knowledge *about* them, what scholars can do is to invite them to write together and include them in the process of creating knowledge. Krause, for instance, suggests working with refugee peer-researchers—that is, conducting and analysing research together (Krause 2017b). Khosravi, on the other hand, calls for a collaborative auto-ethnographic approach involving both the researcher and the migrant (Khosravi 2018). Inspired by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's 'third voice', Krause maintains that research should neither speak *about* nor *for* refugees, but should be developed *with* them. This joint voice emerges in the process of shared experiences, collaborative interpretation, and analysis of data (Krause 2017b). It is in this way that methods can be 'generous' (Ingold 2017), inclusive (Law 2004, 15), and recognizant of the other (Fabian 1999).

[102] In his article, Fabian scrutinises *recognition* in three glosses: recognition as an (1) act of cognition, (2) an act of memory, and finally (3) an act of acknowledgement (Fabian 1999).

Speaking with refugees can be empowering not only for the researched, but also for the researcher herself (Fessenden 2015). With regards to the CAR refugees, we did try out this participatory approach—for instance, with Esatis, whom we saw grow from an apprentice rapper into a fully fledged slammer (as we will discuss in Chapter VIII); or with Max, who grew from an incidental blogger into a novelist and whose work, which resembles an auto-ethnography, I extensively quote in the course of this thesis (M.-L. Kassaï in preparation). But there were also smaller instances of co-creation, which have not led to concrete projects, but which were valuable experiences—such as the joint interviews of other refugees we carried out with Le Firmin in Kinshasa, or the life stories about elderly people in Libenge we collected and filmed with a Congolese journalist.[103]

b) On Matsutake

There are different levels of co-creating. The production of knowledge with artists, refugees, and other informants in the field is just one of them. In this section, I present another type of co-creative endeavour, one carried out with my colleagues. From the outset, the CTD research project, under which my work falls, called for a collaborative approach among fellow PhD colleagues, junior and senior researchers (in other words, PhDs and supervisor), as well as between PhDs and an ethnographic filmmaker. From the outset, the overall project was characterized by a philosophy of deep exchange—meaning that colleagues should not only exchange ideas during workshops or writing periods, but should experience one another's fields of research. I admit I extensively picked the fruits of this philosophy and visited colleagues in three different African countries, which not only introduced me to new fields and perspectives, but made me understand my own field and my own research better. The visits included Inge Ligtvoet's multi-sited field in Nigeria (in March 2014), Adamou Amadou's field in eastern Cameroon (in April 2014 and already described in Chapter II), and a short visit to Souleymane Adoum in Brazzaville (in November 2014). Conversely, I too received field

[103] As a journalist working within the Congolese police, working with this person brought up a lot of sensitive and ethical issues, and I have chosen to not include data about this person in this thesis. However, this historical joint project, which we had even named *Lisapo ya Mboka* (Story of the country), cannot be omitted in a paragraph about acknowledgement and co-creation. Through *Lisapo ya Mboka* we collected the (filmed) stories and photographs of four elderly people in Libenge, the oldest one being 92 at the time of interviewing. Being a journalist, this person would carry out the interviews, pushing my role as a researcher from interviewer to filmer, forcing me to not intervene and keep quiet as the interview was taking place. We would carefully prepare the interviews and the questions and discuss our different approaches towards them, which ranged from a very entertaining and even comic Congolese journalism, to a more observing and withholding-from-interruptions Western ethnographic approach.

visits in DR Congo: I travelled with my supervisor Mirjam de Bruijn from Kinshasa to Bangui (in June 2014), and the photographs from this trip are used throughout this thesis; and I received Inge Ligtvoet and Sjoerd Sijsma both for a week but at different stages of my stay in Kinshasa (in August 2014 and February 2014 respectively). The visits of all three not only helped me to reflect about my field but, as I have mentioned in this chapter, it gave me 'weight' and credibility in the eyes of the CAR refugee-students and thus had a direct impact on trust building.

Thus, recognizing debts to both my informants and colleagues by expressing the usual gratitude in the Acknowledgements (and only in the Acknowledgements) would be inappropriate. During but also after fieldwork, we were engaged in a common task, that of creating knowledge together. The Matsutake Worlds Research Group (MWRG) rightly claim that scholars need to start by recognizing they never work alone (Choy et al. 2009). Even if the MWRG do not cross the boundaries of the academic world—they limit themselves to co-creation within academia—the authors, nevertheless, highlight some important points. In order to do so, they employ the metaphor of Matsutake, a very rare but coveted mushroom, a sought-after culinary delicacy. First of all, they explain, it is impossible to cultivate Matsutake. Gatherers simply need to wait for all the right conditions to be in place in order for it to grow. Like the Matsutake, the authors argue, collaboration is difficult to plan and only arises if all the right elements are in place. Secondly, the research on and commerce in Matsutake requires the involvement of different experts. The task of writing with others is not an easy one, but it is certainly a rewarding task. Working with others, the authors write, defies the impulse of centralizing and totalizing knowledge production (Inoue in Choy et al. 2009, 399). Thus, for instance, even though I am writing this thesis 'alone', the process on which it is based is a joint effort and involves many hands and heads. The process was anything but single-authored. Knowledge cannot be hijacked by a single author; it belongs to us all. If researchers (academic and others) allow themselves such openness to others as well as to the unexpected, the result is an exceptional and unique fruit, an intricate rose.

Figure 36 The intricate rose
(Left) The beloved rose of the Little Prince (Saint-Exupéry 2007, 45). (Right) Close-up of a flower in Libenge, taken in front of the AT's veranda (December 2014). The rose can stand as a symbol for the co-creative project carried out together with Sapin Makengele and Papa Henri Azunda, yet it also symbolizes co-creation in general.

c) The walls of the university

My purpose in taking so many words to describe the collaboration with informants, refugees, artists, and other scholars is not merely anecdotal. There is something larger at stake. I am inspired by scholars who formulate post-modern critiques of the process of epistemology of the university in order to critically question our own methods and actions, as well as the systems in which they are rooted. Collaboration does not relate merely to the researcher's personal relations with others; it uncovers a fundamentally unequal system, one that ranks knowledge in types. Collaborative approaches towards knowledge production, on the contrary, do not consider academic knowledge produced in an institute (or university) more valuable than the knowledge produced by artists, activists, migrants, peasants, and other individuals. It is just different knowledge.

The challenge lies in how to level down these inequalities and aim at inclusiveness beyond the walls of academic institutions. In addition to how we collect, interpret, and give back data, the discussion also deals with output and the end-products of research: dissemination, to use Ingold's term. By being the one who translates the field into *graphy*, into written words, the author (the ethnographer, the researcher, the historian—in sum, the academic attached to a university) retains authority—and responsibility—over her book. But by doing so, does she give in to the power hierarchies? Are researchers who advocate for collaboration, co-creation, alternative methods, and inclusive epistemologies doomed to be part of the inequalities of the academic world?

Should then academic publications still be the only results academics should strive for? And conversely, is it the only criterion on which academic competence should be assessed? Inoue calls for new modes of ethnographic writing, and Law suggests that the academy needs to imagine other metaphors for its activities(Law 2004; Inoue in Choy et al. 2009, 398) . Other scholars, too, have explored and created new possibilities to present results of research and to reach new, and wider,

publics (Puwar and Sharma 2012).There is a growing trend whereby researchers work together with activists or artists (Puwar 2011; Michel 2013; Battaglia 2014; De Boeck and Baloji 2016; Bruijn and Lalaye 2016; De Bruijn et al. 2017). Just like *curating sociology,* co-creation cannot be 'be reduced to a set of research techniques or methods'. It goes deeper: it is an approach to method, a methodological commitment to collaborative knowledge production for creative public intervention and engagement (Puwar and Sharma 2012, 43).

Puwar encourages and challenges other scholars to use the walls of universities, not as barriers but as contact zones that offer opportunities to present academic work differently—in her case through exhibitions.[104] Co-creative and collaborative approaches towards epistemology equally encouraged the CTD team, despite the challenges, to hold its final conference in Central Africa, more specifically in N'Djaména (Chad) instead of in Leiden (The Netherlands) (De Bruijn and Both unpublished). Over the period of a week, different scholars, artists, journalists, activists, and other engaged citizens from Western Europe and Central Africa met in N'Djaména in October 2017, in order to discuss, to learn, and to 'un-border'. 'Now that we have written the script,' De Bruijn writes, 'we do not know where this will go. The project has an ending that is an opening towards the future, and this is an intrinsic feature of this work' (De Bruijn and et al. 2017). There cannot be an end to creation; where there is a call, there will always be a response (Puwar and Sharma 2012). Results and observations lead to new questions and give birth to new thoughts, and ideas develop further. Co-creation, despite its challenges, is an open door to a path that never seems to end. It is in this sense that I hope this thesis contributes to debates that push scholars to think differently about methodology and epistemology.

[104] Seminar 'Migrant Ethnographies', Universiteit Utrecht, 22 September 2017