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Speaking for the 'other'? Representation, positionality and subjectivity in ethnographic fieldwork in Danish and Kenyan education institutions

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1 Introduction

Scholars have focused on the term 'subalternity' in various theoretical discourses, identifying the problem of speaking in research on behalf of 'others', leading to the problem of deprivation and a lack of representation (Spivak, 1988). Based on two long-term periods of ethnographic fieldwork with student teachers (hereafter: students) and teachers in paradigmatically different contexts, Kenya and Denmark, this article explores the dilemma of making subalterns 'speak for themselves' or, alternatively, 'speaking for them', positioning the subjects in diverse roles, including entering a potentially foreign discourse, for instance a 'matrix of domination' (Collins, 1998) that may deprive them of their own language (Spivak, 1988). 'The matrix of domination' (Collins, 1998) is a coherent system of different, oppressive systems deciding what is illegitimate, abnormal and inappropriate. This article discusses how issues of representation, positionality and subjectivity in ethnographic fieldwork may be deeply ingrained part of a research endeavour, inspired by Geertz's notion of experience as both 'near and distant' (1983), simultaneously being a participant and an observer. The question is how a representation of 'the other' may emerge and what it may look like during fieldwork that juggles the dilemma of engaging with objectivity and neutrality (Tedlock, 2000), at the same time implies partisanship because the researcher must inevitably choose side (Hammersley, 2000).

Exploring issues of representation in ethnographic fieldwork in two paradigmatically different education institutions may inform us about differences and similarities when representing 'the other'. Underlying this is an interest in how researcher subjectivity is transformed into positioning, representation and distant-personal relations with 'the other', and how this becomes ingrained in fieldwork process. Although Denzin et al. (2006, p. 778) argues that, 'We can now embrace sophisticated theoretical stances on critical and qualitative race and ethnic perspectives, border voices, queer, feminist, indigenous and other non-Western lenses and epistemologies', the question of representation remains relatively ignored and unsolved in qualitative research. Qualitative research struggles with an ongoing 'triple crisis of representation, legitimation and praxis' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 7), placing the issue of knowledge production and the role of power, identity and positionality at the centre of research (Day, 2012, p. 63). So, how can issues of representation be approached during research processes in ethnographic fieldwork? Using myself, a white, female academic from the global North as a medium of subjectivity, negotiation and positionality in fieldwork with students and teachers in a global southern, respectively northern, context led to different versions of fieldwork in which the everyday handling of roles, positions and power was always relevant.

The article draws on material and fieldnotes generated during several field trips to Kenyan teacher training colleges (TTCs) over the years 2000-2012 (a total of 39 months) and

ethnographic fieldwork at Danish university colleges (UCs) in 2017-2019 (a total of 3 months) with students, teachers, tutors and school managements. The two localities were selected as examples of different contexts of global, historical and material diversity, with particular focus on diversity in sociocultural expression. The majority of the empirical material from Kenya was generated in shared processes involving field assistants and me; in Denmark it was generated solely by me. To understand how issues of positionality and subjectivity are reflected in positioning and representing 'the other', the article explores fieldwork processes by drawing on ethnographic methodological literature (Geertz, 1983; Melhuus, 2002; Sultana, 2007; Jones, 2001); narrative theory (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988); and critical psychology/microsociology (Holzkamp, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Bourdieu, 1986). The problem of representation is approached by looking at the interplay and differences in the two contexts between researcher and informants' positioning and power (Bourdieu, 1984), identity work and meaning-making (Polkinghorne, 1988; Bruner, 1990) and everyday conduct of life (Holzkamp, 1998) in situated communities in social fields of education institutions (Bourdieu, 1986; Wenger, 1998). By exploring issues related to 'the other' rather than solely issues of subalternity, it is possible to include more of the context such as people's own voices, their dreams, hopes and struggles; this does not mean that issues of coloniality, power and domination are overlooked, but rather that 'issues of relevance' that carry meaning (Melhuus, 2002, p. 82) are included in order to embrace a wider and more nuanced view of who the subjects are.

2 Positionality, representation and subjectivity in research

Coming from the North as a white, female, European researcher to conduct research in a Sub-Saharan African context such as Kenya raises questions about who gets to represent whom and how we can understand the experience of 'the other', in this other world and cosmology of being and becoming (cf. Dahl, 2021, p. 39). According to Stenhouse (1979, cited in Jones, 2001, p. 3), there will always be a certain 'impulse behind all research', such as interest and curiosity, no matter how objectively a researcher approaches a study. This is in line with Hammersley (2000, p. 27), who claims that the ideal of objectivity and neutrality must be rejected and replaced by subtle realism, since there is no such thing as objective knowledge; rather, there are 'knowledges' from different perspectives which are likely to be in conflict. So, no matter how objectively a researcher attempts to approach the study, some measure of subjectivity will always be included in the research and final outputs. The idea that research is 'interest free' must therefore be abandoned and replaced by reflexive research processes and, as mentioned by scholars (Sanjek, 1990; Spradley, 1979), an explication of choices and paths in the research process. Within ethnography, the way of validating outputs of a given research, is, according to Sanjek (1990), to provide a detailed account of the steps or methodological 'paths' that led to the empirical data. Accounting for systematic analyses and descriptions makes it is possible for outsiders to follow the observed sphere of life and actions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 226-227). The rationale behind this is to provide the reader with an opportunity to evaluate the inquiries. Drawing on multiple methods (interviews, conversations, observations, document analysis, etc.) during long periods of fieldwork presupposes that the researcher gradually becomes a participant observer in the ethnographic field. However, the appreciation of long-term fieldwork and variety of methods does not account for the problem of researcher subjectivity, partisanship and 'taking sides' (Hammersley, 2000). As mentioned by Malinowski (1922, p. 4), the ethnographic outcome is often immensely remote from the raw empirical data. Hence, the issue of how the researcher's positionality and subjectivity come to represent 'the other' – in ways that include other, simultaneous voices in a discourse that is neither foreign to 'the other' nor to the academic

processes – is probably an impossible ideal. However, this does not entail that the empirical material should be explored as representative of an objective, 'measurable' social reality (Janesick, 2000, p. 391); rather, it should be approached as a site for multiple interpretative practices regarding social reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 6). This means embedding reflexivity and transparency into the paths of fieldwork so that it aims, even if only ideally, at understanding the researcher and the researched, even though some scholars have mentioned that these understandings remain 'ambitious claims to comprehensive knowledge' (Rose, 1997, p. 305). As mentioned by Foucault (1977), knowledge and power are inextricably connected. If power is an invisible and productive resource encompassing all inquiries in which different positions are present, then knowledge about 'the other' is only partially situated (Rose, 1997, p. 319) since power is not a stable matter but diverges depending on the social setting. Exploring different contexts of power, positioning and everyday life may therefore inform us about differences in dominance and interactions in everyday juggling and meaning-making, and hence also about how to explore the problem of representation in different contexts.

3 Doing fieldwork in Kenyan and Danish schools and teacher education institutions

Schools and teacher education institutions in Kenya and Denmark share many similarities in terms of contextual situation, but the sociocultural expressions of the two settings are very different. Schooling in Kenya was initiated by British missionaries who, until 1911, controlled education in Kenya with the purpose of 'enlightening' Africans 'so that they could read the Bible and assist spreading Christianity and western civilization to fellow Africans' (Eshiwani, 1993, p. 17). Most primary schools and TTCs are situated in rural areas, where teachers are often among the few governmental professionals, responsible for teaching classes up to more than a hundred pupils in resource deprived contexts with a general lack of everything from food to teaching materials, classroom furniture and sanitary measures (Dahl, 2012). Kenyan teacher training today consists of a two-year residential course with 18 examinable subjects focusing on detailed, core-subject knowledge. It takes place at one of 17 governmental and currently about seventy-five private TTCs with around 600 students each (Dahl, 2021). Strong Christian religious influence on local management committees at public TTCs has probably led to what has been termed informal, moralistic education (Dahl, 2015) in highly bureaucratic settings of Kenyan TTCs. Kenya gained its independence in 1963, but colonialism seemingly continues to 'function and is expressed in many interrelated ways in processes of oppression, domination and exclusion between the South and the North' (Dahl, 2021, p. 7), for instance in the form of the 'coloniality' of knowledge, of power and of being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, cited in Dahl, 2021, p. 7). Focusing on 'the other' in Kenyan teacher education therefore also means focusing on imbalances in the ways in which subjects and their minds have been colonised with particular ways of understanding what education is and ought to be.

Danish teacher education started in 1791 in locally built TTCs. In 2007, the TTCs merged with other professional Bachelor's education institutions into today's six UCs that include up to 10,000 students and 2,500 student teachers. Many UCs today appear as all-encompassing villages with supermarkets, pharmacies, large cafeterias and hotel-like receptions on impersonal campuses characterised by 'hard functionalism' (Kirkeby, 2006, cited in Tanggaard & Szulewicz, 2013, p. 80). In spite of increased interest in class-managerial and relational competences, teacher education has become more academic, with subject specialisations and augmented admission criteria based on academic merits – despite recruitment problems (Dahl, 2020, p. 148). Doing fieldwork in the different settings posed

different challenges such as to establish rapport with informants and alleviate fear (Kenyan teachers), and deal with biased expectations of the study (Danish students and Kenyan teachers), as well as excessively wordy, analysed content (Danish students) (see Dahl, 2020, 2021). Yet regardless of people, situations and context, problems of representation was always apparent and required – in different ways – engaging with differences of negotiating and positioning in complex contexts of power, expectations and asymmetrical relations, as discussed below.

4 Findings and discussion

The following section contains a discussion of some of the most prevalent themes that emerged during the fieldwork and affected the question of representation across the two contexts. The emerging themes concerned questions regarding representation as an issue of cultural comparison; negotiating power and positionality in different social communities; and performing rather than merely engaging in participant observation. Some of these themes are mentioned in the literature (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988) and in ethnographic methodology literature (Spradley, 1979); however discussing representation in ethnographic fieldwork as a performative positionality ingrained in multiple comparisons, and deconstructing subjectivity as narration and ongoing processes of becoming, for instance through ethnographic processes, is to my knowledge ignored in the literature.

4.1 Representation as an issue of comparison

In comparative studies, the issue of representation involves questions of what is compared; in ethnography, representing persons, situations and places is often thought of as an issue of juggling the duality of emic and ethic perspectives, as mentioned by Geertz (1993), working from 'near and distant' perspectives. So, how can issues of comparison inform questions about how informants become represented through ethnographic fieldwork? Although there is little agreement in anthropology about what constitutes the comparative method and the many inherent variables involved in making comparisons (Moore, 2005, p. 2-3), Melhuus (2002) suggests that comparisons involve comparing cultural content, not issues, things or people (see Dahl, 2021, p. 46ff.). Inspired by Melhuus (2002), the problem of representation is one of comparing meaning and ways of constructing relationships between objects, persons and situations. In cross-cultural comparisons, this implies constructing 'issues of relevance' that carry meaning (Melhuus, 2002, p. 82), instead of focusing on people, objects and essences. This means maintaining the ethnographic richness (Melhuus, 2002, p. 82) so that emphasis is on how cultural meaning creates systems or coherence, how meaning becomes significant and how distinctions are perceived. Therefore, the issue of relevance will be comparing the variety of meaningful universes for students and teachers in the two sociocultural contexts of schools and teacher education in Kenya and Denmark. Strathern (1987) argues that sense derives from context, meaning that we need to focus on the education institution as a social field (Bourdieu, 1986) in which students, teachers, field assistant and researcher identities are negotiated and positioned. This means that there is a double relationship (Holzkamp, 2005) between the persons and their surroundings, so that people both construct their conditions of life and exist under these conditions: in other words, people and their subjectivity are both producers of and subject to these conditions. When analysing and writing up the field material, a deliberate exploration of context was therefore necessary to make the interpretation visible and available (Melhuus, 2002), and to acknowledge that the story told was one of several possible interpretations where other stories might also have been told (Haraway, 1992). Representing 'the other' in the final analysis therefore concerned finding the most plausible story, at the same time closely analysing the relationship between the

empirical material and the setting in which it occurred and was compared. This meant paying attention to details and contradictions, exceptions and patterns, and – by exploring the relations between categories and forms of cultural meaning that emerged during the fieldwork – to locate the most plausible interpretation (see Dahl, 2021).

Global TTC was a private Kenyan TTC with a stratified, fast-growing and aggressive youth culture in which students became categorized as members of different student communities, each of which had distinct identities and feelings of belonging in the teaching profession. The institution took a minimalist role in 'bringing up students', and freedom was appreciated by the students as well as the administration in a context where highly bureaucratic structures seemed a general rule of public TTCs. I characterized the place as 'Self-display in capitalism and reversing the social order' and student's identity searches as 'I am somebody' (Dahl, 2021, p. 117), indicative of the contextually ('capitalism') situated social practices ('reversing the social order') in which specific processes of becoming took place ('self-display'). Apart from closely examining the relationship between the material and the setting, I turned to multiple sources of information, generating thousands of pages of fieldnotes that reflected a multifaceted, complex and not always clear-cut empirical material. I had to accept that data could not be comprehended through the spoken words and actions themselves because the context was 'doubly constructed' (Melhuus, 2002, p. 87; see Dahl, 2021), first by informants, then in the common space between assistants and myself, and lastly by me (see Dahl, 2021, p. 48). Identifying the most plausible story and acknowledging that all knowledge is situated (Haraway, 1992) means relying on many voices, materials, theoretical concepts and methods, as illustrated in the below analysis of students' identity processes at Global TTC:

> "According to the Dean, Global students had often failed in other aspects of life compared to students at other colleges, and were 'either very fresh or very old, somebody who has finished high school long ago'. 'Freshers' saw the college as a continuation of high school and therefore had a high school mentality. Many students, according to the Dean, met college with 'childish behaviours' and had difficulties understanding the social and cultural boundaries regarding intimate relationships, drinking, and socializing with tutors, many of whom were age-mates of the students. (...) Older students usually kept to themselves, went to bed early and shared informal communities with other married students and students with children. They discussed the challenges of college and how to survive in a fast-growing and aggressive youth culture like Global.
>
> 'We manage to control them a bit', the Dean confessed when discussing how to deal with the younger students' high school mentality, but in practice very little was done to effect control. Instead, students were encouraged to (...) [relax]. Socializing with other students and taking part in the college's youth life was a legitimate way for students to spend time. The social world of the college was also divided in other ways. Students who paid their fees in full before the semester started were a small group referred to as the 'bosses'. They believed to be invincible, superior and matchless, and enjoyed enhanced rights because having paid their fees gave them exclusive status. They toured the compound in long black coats over unbuttoned college uniforms with American-style caps turned backwards, in the style of hip-hop musicians. The bosses were also referred to as 'the untouchables' by other students – students who could not be punished, sent home or in other ways disciplined compared to average students who suffered due to constant outstanding fees. Bosses often did not comply with the few college rules [compared to other colleges' somewhat harsh and countless rules that were strictly enforced], and felt entitled to make their own. They often forced their private

> regime on that of the institution, as the following conversation overheard by field assistants between two students marked as bosses by other students, illustrates:
>
> George: Imagine, the tutor gave me a punishment to do! I refused. The tutor then decided to take me to the director. I told him [the tutor] that I cannot do the punishment. After all, we are the people who pay them. Without us the college cannot run, and they cannot have their salaries.
>
> Chris (laughs): Even the director always tells us that we are the bosses of this college! (Observation, men's dormitory).
>
> It often appeared that the bosses could behave as they wished [as mentioned by a male student who belonged to another student group than 'the Bosses']:
>
> Allan: The director has a category of students that you don't dare touch. They are the untouchables. These students have completed a whole year's fees. Even tutors cannot tell them anything. If they are found to do a mistake and the tutor takes them to the director, or even the director just hearing about it, then whoever is trying to disturb the student in terms of punishment is always on the wrong. (...) (Informal conversation, dining hall).
>
> Untouchables did not feel subject to the formal sanction system, and superiors had little disciplinary possibilities, since these students were protected by the director. They disregarded the principal's authority and were in positions to negotiate directly with the main source of power in the institution, [as mentioned by a male student],
>
> Mike: We want to deal directly with the director, 'cause the principal is just another employee. (...) We are the bosses here. We have the authority to decide what should be done to us."
>
> (Analysis of different observations, Kenyan TTC, cited from Dahl, 2021, p. 126-128).

The above representation of the social group illustrates, how 'Bosses' were viewed as highly ranked students in the institution, possessing many forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). They dominated and positioned themselves as a distinct social group (Bourdieu, 1984) of 'untouchables' in a somewhat liberal organizational field. The representation of Bosses was constructed by reflecting on many forms of empirical material: among other, semi-structured interviews, daily conversations with students and staff at TTC, deep hanging out and participant observation among Bosses and other students at college. This required constant reflexivity among field assistants and myself and numerous returns to the field over the years of fieldwork. In this process, many forms of 'knowledge', including theoretical concepts and perspectives such as identity, school culture, Bourdieu's theory complex of field and social practices, social communities of practice and many others, informed the empirical analysis. By paying attention to details and contradictions, exceptions and patterns, and by exploring the relations between categories, I tried to identify the most plausible of the possible interpretations, well aware that other stories could also have been told (Dahl, 2021, p. 48). Geertz's notion of 'Deep hanging out' (1998) as well as numerous fieldnotes generated by different actors (field assistants and myself) provided a multifaceted lens. However, representing 'the other' as Bosses with their identity on self-display, in a context where the social order was reversed, necessitated constant reflexivity in terms of the empirical material, methods and numerous players engaging in everyday life, each of whom brought to the research process 'a wide range of perspectives and "truths", including the researcher's own'

(Jones, 2001, p. 3). The problem of representation concerned comparing cultural meanings and ways of constructing relationships between objects, persons and situations (Melhuus, 2002, cited in Dahl, 2021, p. 38), which meant engaging with people and their meaning-making. Lave and Wenger (2003, p. 196) mention that long-time fieldwork makes it possible to generate material that is so robust that it cannot be transformed into any personal favourite interpretation. Hence, spending many years in a field, foreign to me, made it possible to generate a sense that somewhat went beyond indifferent interpretations.

In Danish schools and UCs, the fieldwork played out differently. Although my own cultural background shared many similarities with students and teachers, it was difficult to locate informants in time- and space restricted contexts, which again influenced processes of familiarity. Teachers and students were busy, and locating informants among thousands of potential subjects at UC meant relying on incidental recruitment that did not necessarily ensure 'good informants', who were thoroughly enculturated and nonanalytic (Spradley, 1979, p. 46) and had adequate time and interest in the study. First-year students had time but had not been sufficiently engaged in 'natural processes of learning a particular culture' (Spradley, 1979, p. 46-47), and teachers working in schools and thinking back on their time as students represented too analytical approaches with 'outsider's perspectives' of the cultural scene (Spradley, 1979, p. 53), providing particular, subjective perspectives as illustrated below:

> "Main Road [anonymized] was like a peasant's school. That is, it was a nice school to be in. And it is a bit like, you were a left out of all this palaver about how you were supposed to teach ... teachers were still driving around with projectors and such things. Everybody knew each other, and all the girls went to dance classes and all the boys practiced football together. Everyone were friends and it was so nice. There was just such warmth and care at that school, which I did not think the others [schools] had. Or the others had it too, but it was special for that school. I also think that [there was] this common vision that ... 'we do it in this way, and that is because we think it is the right way to do it'. And the teachers were happy with their jobs; out there, it was just like a part of their identity out there on the Main Road that you had been a teacher, and that you had been that for thirty years, right?" (Interview, 28-year-old female teacher).

As illustrated above, the teacher categorized the school as a 'peasant's school', which was a school with a tightly knit social teacher community (Wenger, 1998), characterized by a high degree of mutual belonging and shared identity focusing on familiarity and strong interdependence. Yet, my own observations of the school indicated a clustered school, where teachers teaching the same year of pupils gathered in the same physical spaces in the large school building and had developed their own teacher identity. The problem of representation concerned comparing material that had different inherent meaning. This was partly due to difficulties with finding non-analytical informants in the time- and economy-restricted context of Danish UCs and schools. Teachers who had time to participate in the study were therefore not employed at schools per se, but this paradoxically also meant that they had become distanced from the cultural meaning since they were not active members of the field at the time of fieldwork. Representing the Danish teachers in the study therefore became a matter of comparing informants' enculturation and generating meaning from material with theoretical lenses that permitted a reflexive approach to informants' own processes of analytical construction.

4.2 Power, subjectivity and negotiation of positionality in peer communities

Acknowledging that the field of TTC in Kenya was a social field with ongoing power struggles and 'games' involving many different actors, situated and positioned my research endeavour in a hierarchical and multifaceted everyday practice (Bourdieu, 1984). This necessitated considerations of how to position my role among my informants, since their interpretation of me would inevitably colour the ways in which they acted, spoke and thought, and what information could be revealed in my presence. Even after many months of fieldwork, my presence was always noticed and constantly negotiated. The researcher role attached to me in schools (Dahl, 2012) and TTCs (Dahl, 2021) in many ways reflected that of a white person coming from a powerful position in the North. This was reflected in the material and served as a filter for what was presented to me in interviews and observations, as well as teaching me about what was regarded as 'proper' and dominant understandings of education, following the above-mentioned 'coloniality' of knowledge, power and being (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, cited in Dahl, 2021, p. 7). Yet it also taught me about the social field as one of highly hierarchical social relations in somewhat bureaucratic institutions. As mentioned by Lave and Wenger (2003, p. 184), the only "apparatus", which is sufficiently complex to understand and learn about human existence is another human being, in this case me. Problems of representation were therefore also related to problems of positioning, negotiation and power, which were ever-present in complex, social fields of institutional bureaucracies.

In Kenya, field assistants assisted with language difficulties but also translated cultural content from observations and interviews. Appearing at schools and TTCs with assistants minimized some of the social and cultural distance between teachers, and myself who were worried about what my 'real' mission in the village and at the TTC was. Yet, in both places it took several months before I could conduct interviews that differentiated from the official rhetoric, since students' and teachers' approaches to me were biased by their interpretation of the social roles attached to my person: being a spy sent from the authorities with the power to sanction, or a good Samaritan sent to the village to do good (Dahl, 2012). Both contexts represented complex hierarchical social force fields with many actors holding different forms of capital and agenda (Bourdieu, 1986): school leaders would leave me waiting for hours in front of their offices, after which I was placed in a low chair to listen to lengthy monologues about the school's lack of resources, or they would shower me with attention and gifts only later on to use me as a strategic tool for the school's funding possibilities (see Dahl, 2012, 2021). The process of establishing social relations with teachers and students was very time-consuming, and they only slowly (partially) accepted my presence without projecting personal agendas onto my person. Staying in the Kenyan village for 22 months and at TTC for 16 months, meeting people on a daily basis, helped the process of them and I negotiating the roles attached to my person. Yet, it also allowed me to understand how social relations were deeply ingrained as ways of navigating in complex, hierarchical fields in which extended family and work structures made everybody socially and economically dependent on each other. People had many experiences with white people, whom they constantly encountered to in the media, through local NGOs and at missionary stations (Dahl, 2021, p. 40). Students and teachers therefore approached me with questions and attitudes suggesting that they thought of me in a range of ways. I wished to position myself outside the roles that were offered to me, at the same time as trying to 'fit in'. This involved continuous negotiation of my (Western) appearance without fully abandoning my position, which would have been seen as suspicious (cf. Dahl, 2021, p. 40). I constantly reflected upon everyday acts such as dressing in long skirts and sleeves, making field notes in secluded places, paying attention to how I addressed

and greeted people, participating in local funerals, driving sick villagers to the hospital and attending lengthy Sunday morning ceremonies in church. These activities, as others have experienced before me (Sultana, 2007), might seem insignificant but had a large impact on the process of my trying to 'fit in' and establish power relations and an authentic researcher identity at the same time as remaining sensitive to the ethical and political aspects involved in the process (see Dahl, 2021, p. 40). This process never ended, but led the fieldnotes and me onto a path towards constructing situatedness in an empirical material that reflected a negotiated position between the researcher and 'the researched', i.e. a shared social practice. In this way, the representation of subjects also became a problem of establishing shared trajectories of participation, drawing on Dreier's (1991) notion of how personal trajectories take place as participation across contexts of social practice.

In Danish UCs, the opposite was the case: field assistants were not necessary to establish rapport and, from the first encounter, students seemingly gladly to share their experiences and opinions with me in often very articulate ways, as illustrated below in a student's account of an experience from a class lesson:

> "So I said to my teacher, 'I don't feel like giving a presentation, I cannot do it, I can't manage it'. Then he just locked the door behind him and said, 'There is a change in the plans today. Melissa starts presenting, and she does that now.' Then [I just said], 'But haven't you heard what I said?' I was totally angry at him (...) I cried and cried and cried, but the whole class, it was just like ... it was funny because no-one could understand what I said. Nevertheless, everyone was nodding appreciatively, as if they really understood what I said. (...) and afterwards I got an applause. (...) And my teacher he was not like, 'Wow, that was so cool!' There was no special treatment, he was just like, 'Yes, super, next one.' (...) I am sure he knew what it took to make Melissa [student referring to herself], present." (28-year-old student).

Apart from signifying how the student's professional becoming was shaped by the teacher's inquiry into the specific institutional sociocultural space (Dahl, 2020), the way sentences are framed and the issues brought up by the student reminded me of being situated in a kind of therapeutical interview in which my role was to listen patiently to the informants' many feelings, frustrations, denials, gratifications and shifting sentiments connected to being students and teachers. Sociologists have mentioned that postmodern individuals are characterized by pluralism, cultural flexibility and enlarged subjectivity which leads to identity changes as subjects increasingly become interwoven in complex relations and networks of communication (Poder, 2002, p. 515). Doing fieldwork in rapidly changing social contexts like Danish UCs meant not only placing emphasis on the informants' and my own subjectivity, but also negotiating my assigned role as a kind of therapist, exploring informants' ever-changing identities and narrations of what it meant to be teacher or student. I quickly became an insider and outsider, both and neither (Gilbert, 1994), and had to juggle my position and the therapeutic role that was often attached to me in the concrete interview situation. Social contexts are arranged for particular social practices and modes of participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and focusing on positionality therefore means including the specific meanings, forces and modes of participation in the specific field – in this case, between students and myself. This meant that I had to approach the fieldwork with empathy and sensitivity, but it also provided me the benefit of being less in a power position in relation to the students, since I – compared to tutors and teachers – was not a member of the educated elite in the specific field.

4.3 Performing participant observation

Bourdieu's notion of practice logic (1977) offers ways of learning about the complex, often unconscious, social patterns of logic that are part of social life at the education institutions. This meant objectifying my own objects and myself as a member to make explicit the meanings and values my informants experienced (see Dahl, 2021, p. 45), and in a Bourdieusian sense developing a 'feel for the game'. Following Malinowski (1922), participant observation aims to explore from within while maintaining a critical distance. Hanging out at schools, TTCs and UCs taught me the nitty-gritty of everyday life (Melhuus, 2002), which helped me become an accepted member of the social field. But it also taught me about the social field by doing and being in these cultural universes. Participant observation is a dual process aiming to capture life from within while at the same time acknowledging interpretation and analysis – for instance, theoretical and other descriptions of the phenomenon. I started by engaging in deep hanging out (Geertz, 1998) in classrooms, staff rooms, canteens and libraries, focusing on situations such as 'guidance and counselling sessions', where Kenyan students and tutors at TTC were controlled and disciplined, and where conflicts often arose. At Danish UCs, I observed students' free time in the canteen hall, where they would engage more freely with each other. These spaces often represented decisive moments: students and tutors showed emotional responses to each other (Kenya) or were outside the reach of institutional discipline (Denmark). In Kenyan TTCs, I soon became a familiar face due to my different physical appearance, which was not the case in Danish UCs; here, I remained anonymous in the crowd of thousands of students, which in some ways affected my possibilities for participation on a more informal basis.

Tedlock mentions (2000, p. 466) that we cannot study the social world without being a part of it, since participation is not tied to objectivity, neutrality or distance. I had to reflect on how my own participation guided and pushed people in various directions. After nearly one year of fieldwork, the teachers at one Kenyan school were still very reluctant to speak with me. One day I took a drastic step and placed myself and a field assistant behind a desk in a nearby maize field, out of earshot but within the visual field of teachers. I accepted the teachers' resistance by keeping my distance in a very literal sense. The following day, two teachers marched into the maize field and invited me for a cup of tea in the staffroom. Soon after, other teachers proposed to participate in an interview. I later learned that my field assistants had observed how the teachers had spent most of the day wondering what I was doing in the maize field in the beating sun. I had broken their resistance by adopting 'a double consciousness' (Tedlock, 2011, p. 333) in which I had to accept my researcher identity as equilibristic and constantly under construction in relation to an ever-changing social world. Doing fieldwork in schools stressed 'the performativity of a nomadic subject' (Tedlock, 2011, p. 333), which applied to both informants and myself. In this case, participation was not only 'natural' and, following Bourdieu (1977), ingrained as an implicit sense, but also a performative act involving the arrangement of the social school scene, engaging field assistants/myself and teachers as both performers/audience. Double conscientiousness was an ongoing state during fieldwork, also in writing up the material. Fieldnotes from the two contexts were compiled, including different voices, narratives and counternarratives (Milner, 2007, p. 396) from students, teachers, assistants and myself. Ultimately, no voice or narrative in an 'objective' analysis is privileged over the other (Dahl, 2021); however, acknowledging that participation is not tied to neutrality, I had to change the main methodological strategy from 'participant observation' to 'observation of participation' (Tedlock, 2000). Among other things, this meant choosing whom to represent in the final write-up of the material; I had to realize that some voices were in fact privileged over others. I also had to acknowledge that

cultural meaning is not a stable entity, nor constructs universal essence or truth (Angrosino & Pérez, 2000, p. 689). When writing up my field notes, I therefore had to choose one possible representation of the voices that emerged during fieldwork over others. The material could have been generated and analysed, and people represented, in numerous ways, but privileging some voices ultimately meant that I aimed at identifying the cultural meaning the field notes and the arrangement of the cultural scene tried to tell me, well aware that some versions of representation, significance and meaning remained buried in the notes.

5 Conclusion

This article discussed issues of representing 'the other' based on fieldwork in two paradigmatically different contexts: Denmark and Kenya. The larger purpose of the article was not to recommend certain ways of representing the other by engaging in different/specific fieldwork, but rather to initiate a critical discussion about how representation can be thought of and realized, and to what effect, and to explore what is possible under which circumstances – in this case, during long-term ethnographic fieldwork.

Comparing two different fieldwork situations in similar institutional contexts (schools and teacher education institutions), situated in paradigmatically diverse sociocultural settings, made it possible to conceive of representation as an analytical, reflexive process that took place through time and mode. Field texts are shaped by 'the selective interest or disinterest of researcher and participant' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 94), which necessitated comparing multiple voices, acts and situations to de/re/construct the many analytical filters that were interwoven in the different voices talking about who 'the other' was. If voices are constructions of multiple identities, narrations (Polkinghorne, 1988) and meaningful stories about the self (Bruner, 1990), then being conscious and transparent about participation and positioning in those social fields of multiple voices may lead to a more reflexive commitment to the principles of objectivity. Inspired by Hammersley (2000, p. 27), the idea of objectivity and neutrality in research must be rejected and replaced with 'a subtle realism'. In both ethnographic fieldwork situations, I engaged with multiple voices from many different subjects, followed numerous paths (some of them leading to dead ends or opening up for new questions and paths), and continuously reflected upon my own and others' participation and positioning, as well as what positioning meant for those images and identities that were negotiated and produced in the social spaces. As fieldwork progressed, the question became not one of making subalterns 'speak for themselves', alternatively 'speaking for them' (Spivak, 1988), but rather reflecting and choosing the most plausible story from long-term engagement with the field, being aware that other stories might as well have been told. Aiming at producing a subtle realism (Hammersley, 2000) when representing 'the other' was uniquely tied to positioning in the social field among social actors, negotiating roles and identities, and thus power processes, trying to build a common story that sceptically, intelligently (Hammersley, 2000) and reflectively situated the person in context, time and everyday 'pulse', while tying subjects' roles, narrations and identities to the multitude of facets that characterized their human lives. This situatedness in time, place and pulse ultimately meant that representation could only be partial, produced and contemporary, but never reflect a real or authentic image since it depended on the multiple processes that were employed, embodied, enforced or even tacit and buried in the fieldwork. Processes of representation were interwoven in steps and choices, strategies and discourses, on an unstable, ongoing and ever-changing sociocultural scene.

Moving from participant observation to observing the participation meant a more active, analytical stance in the multiple situations arising during fieldwork, where I as a researcher

not only attempted to understand matters by embodying subjects' experience in my own body and mind. Rather, it meant engaging in observing subjects' participation and acting upon it, accepting that the researcher can never be a 'fly on the wall', situated somewhere outside the social scene. My fieldwork was in many ways performed, and people's identities developed and happened rather than being the end point of a learning process. It also meant moving from acknowledging the researcher role as subtle, ingrained and passive to acknowledging a more active and strategic stance, emphasising how 'living in, while representing the world' (Tedlock, 2011, p. 334) will make subjects' narrations/identities/roles/selves emerge. The dilemma of letting subalterns 'speak for themselves', alternatively 'speaking for them', must therefore be rephrased as pursuing a representation of 'the other' that is grounded in constant reflexivity in terms of who the subjects are, as we come to understand them/ourselves and they come to understand us/themselves as suspended in time, mode and context. It ultimately means that what other people and we as researchers see is not precise or actual mirrors or analyses of who we essentially are, or who we ever will appear to be. It is merely reflections produced from past experiences, present activities and dreams, intentions and hopes for the future, all of which are woven into our own and other people's lives. Perhaps it makes more sense not to address 'the others' as subalterns but as real people and persons acting and living in the world. So, exploring the dilemma of making subalterns (Spivak, 1988) 'speak for themselves', alternatively 'speaking for them', must be rephrased, allowing us to focus on how questions are formulated and answered by multiple voices in a constructed world.

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