

6. From 'Mess' to Re-Figuring

After introducing the approach of 'methodical careful-mess' and sketching out how I dealt with the messy material, I will now, in the following and last subchapter of Part III, summarise the subject-theoretical inferences resulting from the above considerations and furthermore explain how the continuous oscillation between the empirical material and the methodological considerations (in)formed my method of analysis.

6.1 Topologies of (Un)Belonging

The focus on important spaces within biographical narrations and deep emotional mappings reveals aspects of (un)belonging through a topological perspective that brings about emotional qualities of space and spatial relations which are discursively produced. While discursive potential is attributed to spaces, they are at the same time understood as products of discursive socio-material practice. According to the spatial-theoretical premises I developed in Chapter 3, I conceptualise the oral and visual (hi)stories of the speakers as topologies of un/belonging that are produced relationally,

- from different position(alities) and
- in specific situations, conditions, and contexts of speaking – such as in the interview situations framed by a focus on important places and spaces during childhood and
- the diverse (a)symmetrical power constellations of each encounter.

I frame the topologies that appear in the material as topologies of (un)belonging generally, because I set that frame in our encounters, asking the speakers to not only share their childhood (hi)stories with me in general but to focus on the important spaces of that period. The prefix '(un)' in brackets signifies the ambivalence of belonging, of belonging somewhere by choice and structure. This points to my understanding of children's topologies from the intersections between a post-structural and structural stance, as 'we' elaborated in the string figure play (subchapter 3.3). It also draws on the fact that every time we are either made to belong or choose to belong somewhere, we mostly do this in distinction to and demarcation from others who we do not want to or feel as if we belong

to. The emphasis on '*longing*' (in italics) refers to the aspect of relation through desire, because what we desire or long for depends on what is (de)legitimised and (de)moralised in societies, in the situations and contexts in which we are positioned. That does not mean that we only desire what we have been told to desire. But our desire is greatly influenced by norms and values that are hegemonial in our societies.

The empirical material shows that the emotional topologies of (un)belonging are processual constructs that figure on different scales and scalar entanglements and from the vantage point of different speaker and subject positions and are, as such, additionally based on the reciprocal relation of the self and the human or non-human other. This perspective does not set scale a priori but re-figures how scale matters from the speakers' perspectives. Starting from this rather flat ontology (open narrative-biographical narrations and maps), the reciprocal process of empirical analysis and theory building has led me to re-figure processes of scale-making. I came to this finding during the very beginning of the analysis – when it felt rather like an odyssey within an endless ocean of oral and visual (hi)stories, their visualisations, recordings, and transcripts. Intentionally, I did not start this search with a pre-drawn map of orientation. As explained earlier in subchapter 5.1, I designed my conducting methods to retain the participant's independency and relevance-setting in the interview situation. This format led to very long and unstructured narrations and an enormous corpus of data. The visualisations at the end of the 'interview' sessions helped above all to reduce the free narration again and to break it down to another setting of relevance made not by me but by the speakers themselves. In the foreground of the analysis was the question: What is/was important to the speakers in relation to the spaces that they made relevant? Thus, it is about contexts of meaning that were determined by their relevance settings in the open framework of the narrative interview.

6.2 Four Steps of Analysis

In the following, I describe four steps that I developed and used to analyse the material. As I have already mentioned, the process of mapping served to generate additional insights beyond the narration, which often evoked stronger phenomenological aspects of the speaker's spatial relations. I considered this insight in the analysis and additionally used the maps as a more focused iteration of the complex narration, helping me to grasp the spatial order on which the spatial figuration of childhood was made relevant according to the speakers. The analysis of the maps was therefore integrated into the five steps illustrated in the following. When working with the visual material, I relied on documentary method of image interpretation by Ralf Bohnsack (2009), thereby pursuing an inductive-reconstructive theorisation of biographically relevant materiality of objects, artefacts, bodies, and their socio-spatial relations in the maps. In doing so, however, I remained critical towards connected concepts, such as that of a 'conjunctive experiential space' (*konjunktiver Erfahrungsraum*) in which it is assumed that subjects acquire action-guiding orientation knowledge conditioned by 'commonalities of action practice, biographical experience, fate, i.e., socialisation history' (translated from Bohnsack 2005: 377). In this context, the common social position of being a child, or being of

the same generation, is assumed to lead to such a conjunctive space of shared experience. I do not agree with this assumption and argue that such a conceptualisation of shared experiences is not intersectional enough and can easily lead to a strong essentialisation and naturalisation of the category of the child itself. Rather, it is a matter of empirically reconstructing the effects of this powerful discursive structure of the child or the generation and its impact on biographical self-interpretations from the perspective of the visualisations of their spatial relations. Approaches such as Cornelia Renggli's (2014) discourse-analytical work with images appear helpful for this modification. Based on the assumption that social reality is not only represented by visualisations but is also constituted in them, the maps serve as a medium for accessing phenomenological stocks of spatial memory, experience, and knowledge – above all the habitual, routine action acquired in the mode of internalising social scenarios, gestures, and facial expressions – which constitutes the material nature of biographically relevant spaces. The subsequent section will provide a summary of the analysis process, as outlined in Table 6.

Table 6: Summary of analysis steps.

Material	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Childhood biographical narrations and maps	<i>Spatial codes</i> , e.g., playgrounds	<i>Scales</i> that emerged from spatial codes, e.g., home	<i>Social topologies</i> , e.g., safe spaces <i>Spatial practices</i> , e.g., exclusive protecting	<i>Spatial figures</i> that emerged from A and B, e.g., territory
Architectural ethnographic material on housing type and home-making practices (drawings, notes, photos)	<i>Housing types</i> , e.g., settlement of semi-detached single-family houses	<i>Scalar entanglements of home</i> , e.g., house as home	<i>Topologies of Home</i> combination of housing types and home-making practices, e.g., private community	<i>Spatial figures of home</i> , e.g., home as territory

Source: Table by the author.

STEP 1: Spatial Codes One of the most complex tasks was deciding how to analyse the narrations and maps according to their spatial orders. The complexity of the material, the focus on *class* and *age*, and additionally the translocal contexts demanded a structural logic that could not be answered by the existing methods, which are used (mostly either) for visual, biographical, or more general narrative material. Hence, I developed my own method of analysis that derives from the foundation of the research tradition of grounded theory (Glaser/Strauss 1967). This means that the processes of data collection and theory building were interrelated. I started by coding several interviews in the software MAXQDA. But soon I noticed that I somehow lost the people behind the transcripts. Something real and complex became strangely disassembled and hard to grasp. It seemed tempting to be

scrutinised its entanglements. Against a 'parochial' scalar thinking that works with scales as if they were part of a pre-existing nature of space or reducible to a merely physical or geographical structure of near and far (Ansell 2009: 4), I looked at scale as elaborated in the spatial-theoretical framework (subchapter 3.3). From a relational perspective inspired by the topological rationale, scale, can appear in many ways, such as scale as size (cartography), scale as level (global, national, regional, and local), and scale as relation (for example, glocal) (Howitt 2002: 305).

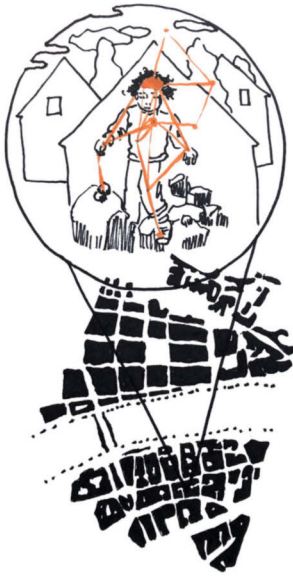
Let me give an example: Economically, Yao (10 yrs, *2009, male, Lumumba, N.) and Pierre (13 yrs, *2006, male, Lavington, N.) are the most contrastive cases of the sampling. In his mapo, Yao only marked spaces that are within the scale of his neighbourhood. None of the spaces that he has marked as important lie beyond the scale of the city. This is the opposite for Pierre. He only marked two spaces within his neighbourhood, and most others lie beyond the scale of the city and nation and even connect to another continent, as he is also living/has lived in Burkina Faso and France. If we look at scale from a geographical or physical perspective, we could easily draw the conclusion that Pierre has a wider world reach. But if we measure 'world reach' by a relational or topological understanding of scale, then we might see that Yao, as the supposedly disadvantaged and immobile person, is engaging in many different intergenerational socio-spatial practices, which are constituting the scale of the neighbourhood through intense socio-material relations. The spatial arrangement he is part of may be small in geographical size, but that space is used in depth. Pierre's world reach, on the contrary, is geographically large and entangles on many different scales, but on an everyday basis he has no access to them. Meanwhile, a purely relational understanding that neglects Euclidian space would run the risk of romanticising Yao's childhood, denying the fact that he might never get a visa to leave the country. This example shows us that scale alone does not tell us much about power, as long as we do not have a clue about how scale matters in young people's lives.

Although these scales must be understood as the first empirical findings of the narrative assemblage, it is important not to draw the conclusion that these are the only scales that matter in children's lives. The existence of scalar entanglements goes far beyond them, yet in some ways they very vividly represent the scales on which children are positioned, or rather not positioned. Nevertheless, as the narrative assemblage will show, children's narration about their home, for example, can at times take global or planetary forms. Therefore, as I have already clarified, the scales must be understood on the basis of a relational or topological understanding of space and not as a measurable unit that spans over physical space.

Therefore, I understand scales not as separated and progressive, but as entangled and processual (difference illustrated in Figure 19), in which they are messy, partial, overlapping, and always in the making. Hence, it is important to note that the following structuring of the subchapters by scales should not be understood as a measure of chronological relevance or size structure indicating that the subject is the smallest and the city the largest scalar unit. Instead, it is my aim to show how, and against this structure, the scale of the subject can cover the entire planet, while the city geographically remains utterly small in the biographical narration, because the city might be only constituted by a couple of islands to which a child has access.

Figure 19: Left: Scales separated and progressive; right: Scales entangled and processual.

separate and progressive



entangled and processual



Source: Illustration by the author.

STEP 3: Social topologies and spatial relations On the basis of this scalar entanglement, the spatial codes, for example playgrounds, were now considered in terms of the spatial practices that constitute them as social topologies. That is, they were considered from a perspective that does not emphasise the object (playground) itself but its spatial relations. In the example of playgrounds, many of them could then be identified as safe spaces, as they serve to protect but also to monitor children (for example, through a fence).

STEP 4: Spatial figures From there, I analysed the social topologies in terms of their dominant spatial practices. Safe spaces, for example – a social topology that emerged from certain types of playgrounds – are spaces that are specifically designed for children. As such, they not only address but also reproduce the child-adult binary. As they are also sometimes exclusive (for example, requiring entrance fees), the dominant spatial practice is better framed as exclusive protection, which is most dominantly connected to the spatial practice of differentiation. Therefore, playgrounds as safe spaces must be understood as spatial figurations of territories (spatial figure). It is important to note here that the spatial figures of territory, network, fluid space, and place elaborated in the string figure play function as an open typology. Therefore, one of my aims was to find out whether there are other spatial figures that cannot be precisely captured by the spatial practices of differentiating, linking, moving, and assembling.

Shifting between Nairobi and Berlin: Concluding Remarks As elaborated earlier, my analysis is strongly contextualised by my position(ality). An important and not yet mentioned part of that positionality is that I also literally changed my geographic position between Nairobi and Berlin. Huda Tayob relates this shifting to Edward Said's notion of 'crossing of boundaries' (Said 1989: 225, cited in Tayob 2018: 210) as a practice that 'could lead to new narrative forms' (ibid.: 210). In that context, she explains that 'drawing and writing on site took time and therefore required a level of engagement with inhabitants' (ibid.: 217), whereas her practice of 're-drawing' when she was later resettled to London 'disrupted the linearity' of the process, 'offered analytical distance', and 'enabled an analytical spatial reading of the sites' (ibid.: 218).

In connection with the questions of *Who speaks? How, for what, and to whom?*, I considered it very important to keep myself as much as I could from drawing consequences (un/hiding) from the material and instead try to find evidence for consequences which the speakers already revealed individually and in relation to the other speakers. Hence, I would like to frame the general mode of handling the analysis beyond the above steps as a practice of 'following', in which I trace the relations the speakers directly and indirectly draw (at times also to other speakers, without knowing). In this approach of following, I started by treating the oral and visual (hi)stories as a whole – regardless of the categories of social inequality, such as age, class, gender, and location – as if I were handling a multi-biography, a biographic assemblage, to trace its relations from a flat ontology. In such a topological perspective, the speakers, their bodies, imagination, and social positions, are seen as nodes of the material and social relation to the world. The question then is not only how dominant discursive formations of scale, such as the nation-state, shape their subjectivities but also how they produce scale through their doings and sayings, therefore participating in the mimetic process of the constitution, reification, compression, expansion, or subversion of socio-spatial orders (of middle-class childhoods).