Postscript: Entangled Comparers
Experiencing Cities through Comparative Ethnography

In urban studies, comparisons are *en vogue*. In her seminal book *Ordinary Cities* (2006a), the geographer Jennifer Robinson prepared the ground for comparative urbanism by claiming that cities should be compared beyond the North–South divide, and that comparisons should be key tools for postcolonial urban theorising from the South. This should enable urban studies to move beyond being a discipline largely rooted in the Northern experience and deprovincialising urban theory (Huffschmid and Wildner 2013, Lemanski 2012, 2014, McFarlane 2010, Nijman 2007, Parnell and Robinson 2012, Robinson 2006b, 2013). In scholarly debates on South African cities and on Lusophone cities, repeated calls for comparisons have been raised. Urbanists working on South Africa have argued that comparing South African cities with others is crucial in order to move beyond framing them as exceptions and special cases (Mbembe and Nuttall 2008, Parnell 1997). As regards Mozambique, researchers observe a 'Lusophone exceptionalism' which has been criticised for inhibiting comparative gestures between Lusophone and other African countries (Pitcher 2002: 9-10). Comparisons hence promise to disrupt boundaries of knowledge and research, to *think* Johannesburg and Maputo through elsewhere (Robinson 2016b) and to generate new understandings of the urban based on the diversity of cities and urban milieus. This book situates itself in this field of comparative urbanism.

Besides reclaiming space for comparisons, Robinson significantly advanced the debate on the politics of comparative theory building. By developing new typologies of comparisons based on expansive literature reviews, she pushed for new and experimental ways of doing comparisons and engaging with complex questions of epistemology around comparison (Robinson 2011, 2016a, 2016b). She proposes to

> … reimagine comparisons as involving the broad practice of thinking cities/the urban through elsewhere (another case, a wider context, existing theoretical imaginations derived from other contexts, connections to other places), in order to better understand outcomes and to contribute to broader conceptualizations and conversations about (aspects of) the urban (Robinson 2016b: 3).

While the literature on comparative urbanism is constantly growing, making it literally a new turn in urban studies, the epistemological and methodological logistics of doing comparisons continue to be challenging and hamper the application of these new ideas (Lees 2012, Lemanski 2014: 2945). This is not least because discussions focus on the pol-

itics of theory building through comparison but also on comparative empirical research itself (Gough 2013), by which I mean the process of data collection and analysis through which urban comparisons come into being. This is a serious lacuna in the debate for at least two reasons: Firstly, focusing the debates on comparison in theory building and the abstract work of comparative arguments rather than on how comparative data become constituted, removes comparative urbanism from the urban dwellers' and researchers' lived experience of cities into the realm of philosophy. Secondly, the lack of concise, intelligible formulations of the way such new ways of doing comparisons may look in practical terms inhibits students from entering the field of comparative urbanism, in ways which go beyond solely making references to the debate as an expression of one's commitment to a more global urban study. This understanding of urban comparisons as a political and theoretical orientation, rather than as a way of undertaking empirical research, finds its culmination in Robinson's article with the telling title 'Thinking cities through elsewhere' (Robinson 2016b). Here, she would appear to claim that comparative urbanism does not necessarily need to be based on actual empirical comparative research but that, in her view, "perhaps the most useful comparative tactic in urban studies is the case study, brought into creative conversation with a wider literature" (ibid: 18). While writing their single case studies, comparative urbanists should read across contexts, improving their own analysis and theorising based on other people's written cases. I will call such an understanding of comparison *thinking cities through elsewhere*, as comparison here refers to intellectual endeavour, enacted while sitting at a desk. In this postscript I make a case for a much broader understanding of comparison, namely, as *experiencing cities through elsewhere*. Through comparative ethnography the researcher becomes involved, hence entangled, with at least two places and strives to develop an analytical framework and a form of description which speak about both cases. As this postscript will show, comparative ethnography hence entails not only *thinking* but also *experiencing* cities through elsewhere, as through comparative ethnography the ethnographer becomes deeply involved with the spaces and the people she researches. In comparative ethnography, the actor who conducts the comparison, the comparer, is not a detached analyser but an involved person, shaping and shaped by the experiences she has in diverse urban contexts. Instead of understanding comparison as a form of analysis conducted at home, maybe even sitting in an armchair, I approach comparative ethnography as a circular process in which the mind, and even the body of the ethnographer, is involved in constant comparisons along the way. In this postscript I make transparent to the reader the process of fieldwork and analysis on which this book was based. It focuses on the processes before the text was written up and introduces some of the intricacies of conducting fieldwork in two places as a single ethnographer. From the point of view of how knowledge is formed, I contend that there is a substantial difference between *thinking* and *experiencing* cities through elsewhere.

Plurality of Comparisons

In order to approach ethnography comparatively, it is important to start thinking about comparisons as being always in the plural and not in the singular. Multiple comparisons take place in the field, in the data analysis and in the writing. The plurality also refers to the written-up text, as out of a single comparative research project diverse

forms of written-up comparisons can result. Thinking about comparisons in the plural, not in the singular, also makes us aware of the multiple ways in which comparison is understood, be it in different disciplines, different schools of thought, or even in everyday life. In conversations about malls in Maputo, urban dwellers repeatedly told me things like "You can't compare the Maputo Shopping Centre to Mandela Square in Sandton". What they meant by this was not that it is impossible to describe differences and similarities between the two malls but rather that the two are very different from each other, and that they regarded Mandela Square as superior in terms of architecture, the way goods are displayed, the range of brands sold and suchlike. In everyday use, to compare means to claim that two things are similar (Handler 2009: 627) and claiming that they are not 'comparable' also means that as shopping malls they are in a different league. This points to two things: first, that what people mean when they speak about comparison can differ greatly, and second, that there is a diversity of comparative practices even in everyday life and within research projects.

The table below presents an overview of some of the comparative practices as they may be encountered during an ethnographic research project. *Comparison as social practice* means that comparison is first and foremost a social and cognitive everyday practice, not an academic method. Humans always compare, whether intentionally or not (Strauss and Quinn 1997). According to phenomenology, actors possess a stock of knowledge from past experiences, which they relate (compare) to a current situation, and which thus shapes their actions (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 971, Schütz and Luckmann 1973). *Comparison as data analysis* refers to the fact that academics compare constantly during data analysis, even in non-comparative research projects. The scientific development of concepts and codes is based on comparison (Kant 1969 [1980], Strauss and Corbin 1990). In the grounded theory approach, for example, the coding of data moves constantly between pieces of data and the searching for codes which grasp several pieces of data (ibid).

Table: Overview of comparative practices during an ethnographic research project

Designation	Explanation
Comparisons as social practice	Comparison as practised by actors in everyday life
Comparisons as data analysis	Coding, developing concepts, comparing instances
Implicit or invisible comparisons	Between the field and home or between data and personal normative ideals
Literature review	Embedding of our cases in the existing literature, comparison of our data to published findings
Armchair comparisons	Using other people's data for comparative analysis, e.g. Tylor, Human Area Files
Life project comparisons	Using own data from previous projects, e.g. Strathern
Team comparisons	Project teams with multiple ethnographic case studies being conducted by different researchers
Single-researcher comparative ethnography	Research containing multiple comparative cases conducted by a one researcher

Implicit or invisible comparisons refers to the fact that ethnographers often make comparisons between field and home during the research process, and often also between reality and personal normative ideals. In such invisible comparisons, one's home culture is "the constant hidden references in relation to which the unknown culture can be described as different" (Caldeira 2000: 7). Because such invisible and implicit comparisons can have a great impact on our analysis, as well as on ethnographies based in one context, reflection about such comparative practices is relevant for the whole discipline and not just for comparative ethnographers.

By *armchair comparison* I refer to the 19th century armchair anthropologists like Edward Tylor who, sitting in an armchair, constructed comparisons based on data collected by others (see below). Today, this refers to comparative practices where comparison is understood as distinct and separate from ethnography, as a form of analytical anthropology which brings together data or cases developed and written by others so as to construct comparative conclusions. *Life project comparisons* refers to anthropologists like Marilyn Strathern, who conduct comparisons based on data which they themselves have collected in different places over the course of their career. Armchair comparison and life project comparisons both happen *after* the fieldwork was conducted. This differs from *team comparisons*, larger research projects in which several ethnographers work on a similar topic in multiple places at the same time, in which comparisons emerge through mutual visits, workshops and co-authorship. In comparative team projects as well as in *single-researcher comparative ethnography*, in which one researcher conducts fieldwork in two or more places and writes about the data herself, the comparative perspective is present from the beginning when writing the proposal. In terms of the way comparative knowledge is formed these are relevant differences. In order to expand our grasp of the diversity of comparative practices, it is important to look at the history of anthropology, as the use of comparison as a method has changed considerably over time.

Positivist Roots

Comparison in the humanities and the social sciences has historically been imported from the natural sciences and was therefore grounded in positivism (Schriewer 2003: 14). By positivism, I refer to the scientific paradigm (Kuhn 2012 [1963]) that emerged from the natural sciences, which assumes that there is an objective reality and context-independent data. Positivist approaches to comparison in anthropology go back to Tylor. His cultural evolutionism encompassed a theory about universal laws developed on the basis of the systematic comparison of cultural forms (Tylor 1889). At that time, comparison was seen as central to the expansion of knowledge that the new sciences and imperialism were thought to bring (Melas 2007: 20-22). With his comparisons Tylor aimed to show that there were many similarities among the different 'civilisations' and 'cultures' and that one therefore had to recognise the 'psychic unity of mankind' (Tylor 1889: 44). Analogous to comparative urbanism, which aims to undo hierarchies between cities of the North and South, Tylor also aimed to undo a hierarchy of thinking. With his comparisons he criticised the then prominent distinction between inferior and superior races, arguing that differences exist because of culture, not because of race. Each culture that he drew into his comparisons was at a different stage of cultural evolution, he theorised. Through comparison, he hence introduced a new hierarchy of thinking, namely, between 'primitive cultures' and 'civilisations'.

Tylor's comparisons and the theory of evolutionism have received ample critique since then, among other reasons because he totally ignored the context of the data he analysed in his armchair, and because these temporalising comparisons deny the 'primitive cultures' coevalness (Fabian 1983, Melas 2007).

There have been many other comparative anthropologists, for example the diffusionist Friedrich Ratzel and the cultural morphologist Leo Frobenius (1933).[1] It is important to note for the current reflection on comparison that Frobenius' approach was to a certain degree inductive. During his twelve voyages to Africa (1904–1935), Frobenius studied material and immaterial cultural forms across Africa and distinguished them into *Kulturkreise* (culture areas) and *Stile* (styles) (Straube 1990, Streck 2001), which he then compared to each other. So the units of comparison, in this case the different *Kulturkreise* and *Stile*, did not exist at the beginning of his research but rather constituted the key results of the study. This differs from a hypothesis-driven comparison which defines units of comparison from the onset. However, rather than being interested in the specificities of African cultural forms, his aim was to contribute to the grand theories which were in vogue at that time.

Another milestone in the history of comparison in anthropology, which should be seen in as critical terms as the one already mentioned, are the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) by Murdock and his colleagues at Yale. This compendium of world cultures was meant to provide data for cross-cultural comparisons for anyone who wanted to use it. Like Tylor, the HRAF was a negative example in the history of comparison, as there were massive problems with the empirical foundations of the data, not to speak of the decontextualising, mathematical techniques used to identify 'correlations' between cultures and cultural 'universals' (Moore 1993, Yengoyan 2006: 139).

The anthropological critiques of such comparisons are as old as the discipline itself. The cultural relativist, Franz Boas (1896), was one of the first to formulate key concerns about Tylor's comparative method. Boas made an important claim which is still relevant today, namely, that cultures have to be understood first in their own specificity, and only thereafter should comparisons be drawn (Boas 2004, Bohannan and Glazer 1988, Dürr, Kasten and Renner 1992). Although cultural relativists strongly criticised speculative comparisons in the style of Tylor, comparison remained important for the discipline (e.g. Benedict 1946 [1934]). Mead's famous ethnography of Samoa had comparative aspects, as she compared growing up in Samoa with the troubled teenage phase in American society in the 1920s (Mead 1928). Comparing the 'field' and 'home' in explicit terms can contribute to addressing social problems in the anthropologists' own societies, something which Mead and Benedict saw as anthropology's public responsibility (Fox and Gingrich 2002). This public responsibility was appealed to again in discussion regarding the crisis of representation (Marcus and Fischer 1986). Through comparison, anthropology can render the 'home' culture of the anthropologist visible as culturally specific and not as human nature (Handler 2009: 635). Com-

1 Frobenius collected material and immaterial cultural forms across Africa and ordered them in space with the help of cartography. His *Kulturkreise* are a spatially and temporally ordered typology of cultural forms, which he explained through Ratzel's theory of diffusion. Linking the competing theories of diffusion and evolutionism, Frobenius argued that every culture has an own *paideuma* characterised by an evolutionary process explaining the differences, yet similarities come into being because of diffusion and contact (Frobenius 1933, Haller 2005: 41).

parison therefore has the potential to serve as a tool to expose assumptions and ideologies of the 'home' societies.

More careful, more contextualised and so-called 'controlled' approaches to comparison were developed between the 1940s and 1960s by British structural functionalists, as they moved from comparing 'cultures' to comparing 'societies' (Brettell 2009: 652, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1987 [1940], Yengoyan 2006: 140). One way of moving beyond the decontextualising HRAF style of comparison was to make 'regional' comparisons, as anthropologists believed that it was easier to compare cultures that were similar, and that by making comparisons on a geographically or culturally limited scale, they could control the number of 'variables' shaping differences and similarities (Eggan 1954, Holý 1987b: 3). The idea of 'controlling variables' is misleading, however, as complexity (and hence the number of 'variables') is related to the detailed nature of research rather than 'objective' similarities between the fields (see also Strathern 1992). In addition, the important factors that shape the topic of study will only be clear at the end of the comparative process and should not assumed at the outset. Last, but not least, what should also be mentioned is that the history of comparative methods also entailed approaches which paid a lot of attention to context, for example the scholars of the Manchester School under Gluckman from whom Robinson draws her inspiration for comparative urbanism, as well as anthropologists working on Melanesia like Sahlins, Strathern and Godelier. There has always been a heterogeneity of comparative methodologies (Fox and Gingrich 2002: 5, Strathern 2002: xiii).

Crisis of Comparison

Since the 1960s, not least because of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, anthropology has moved away from generalisation towards description and meanings (Geertz 1983, Yengoyan 2006: 141). From the 1970s onwards, key categories like culture became questioned (Abu-Lughod 1991, Lentz 2011, Lentz 2013a). With the shift to theories of practice and agency, culture became deconstructed as a problematic, imprecise category to explain social action (Ortner 2006, Yengoyan 2006: 143). As the units of analysis in cross-cultural analysis were 'cultures', this had severe consequences for comparative anthropology: what were anthropologists actually comparing, if not 'cultures'? The consequences of these shifts have not yet been sufficiently discussed.

In the crisis of representation comparison per se was rarely discussed. The debate tended to focus on ethnographic authority and the critique of the apolitical and ahistorical nature of anthropology (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Marcus and Fischer 1986). The anthropologist John Hutnyk (1990) was one of the few who linked the debate to systematic reflection on comparison. Hutnyk (1990: 83) pointed out that the crisis of representation made anthropologists acutely aware of the complexities of the cultural realities and the subjective nature of interpretation, so that the comparison of two such interpretations came to be seen as troubling or even impossible. Although he also believed that comparison "thrives on simplicity" (ibid: 94), he did not call for comparison to be abandoned; not least because he argued that every ethnographic description is always comparative even if this is seldom acknowledged (ibid: 82).

Few people shared Hutnyk's claim to continue with comparisons, despite these new challenges. In sum, the crisis of representation made anthropologists turn away from comparison (Hannerz 2010: 547). Many believed that the move towards the use of local concepts inhibited comparison (Yengoyan 2006: 142-143). As the writing cul-

ture debate questioned cultural translation, suggesting that it was embedded in power relations and necessarily imperfect (Asad 1986), so comparison also came to be seen as a colonial, distorting act. Still today, many scholars see comparison as based on an 'imperial ideology' (Zanker and Newbery 2013: 110). A further important critique was that universalist, objectivist comparisons were related to the construction of grand theories, and had therefore to be abolished, together with these totalising theories. Ideas like causality were replaced by meaning, multivocality and relativism (Yengoyan 2006: 142). In retrospect, comparison became seen as a huge fault in rather than a great achievement of the discipline (Gingrich and Thelen 2012: 395).

There were anthropologists who continued to practise comparative methods, but they were those who did not engage with the crisis and largely remained within the positivist framework (e.g. Mace and Pagal 1994). Questions like 'controlling variables' related to the so-called 'Galton's problem' (the apparent 'problem' that cultures are never fully independent from each other) dominated their reflections. Even in a recent edition of a seminal textbook by Bernard (2015) on methods in cultural anthropology, the cross-cultural method introduced is firmly grounded in positivism and aims to 'test hypotheses' (Ember and Ember 2015). Thinking about comparison in positivist terms with positivist terminology such as testing hypotheses, variables, comparability and causality hence still haunts anthropology, and there is an urgent need to free the discipline from this baggage. The paradigm shift from positivism to interpretivism and constructivism is, however, slowly leading to a new body of comparative anthropology which considers the interpretive turn and the crisis of representation.

Interpretive, Post-Crisis Comparative Approaches

It is in thematic, often interdisciplinary, fields that calls for comparison have been raised anew in the last few years. Among others, calls for comparisons emerged in the field of transnationalism and in the political anthropology of citizenship, in the debate on the ontological turn and related fields like multi-species anthropology, and in the already mentioned interdisciplinary, geography-dominated field of postcolonial comparative urbanism. Since the crisis of representation, only three anthropological collections (Gingrich and Fox 2002, Holý 1987a, Scheffer and Niewöhner 2010) have systematically explored new styles of comparison which depart from the positivistic comparative methods.

There are at least *four* particularities which appear across these bodies of literature and which can be seen as the shared basis of an emerging field, which I call interpretive, *post-crisis* comparisons, emerging after the postmodernist *crisis* of representation. Firstly, these scholars share the idea that comparisons do not receive the attention they should. Secondly, they argue that comparison is a key tool for deprovincialising and questioning established knowledge. Thirdly, they claim convincingly that new methodologies should not let themselves be limited by ideas like incommensurability, and fourthly, they believe that practices and processes need to be central instead of fixed units.

First of all, across these literatures, there is agreement that anthropology cannot do without comparison, despite its difficulties and shortfalls (Gingrich and Thelen 2012: 398, Strathern 2002). Even extreme relativists are engaged in cultural translation and therefore compare (Fox and Gingrich 2002: 20). If we fail to reflect on comparison, we fall into the trap of making problematic, implicit and unnoticed comparisons

of self and other, of the exotic and the known (Gingrich and Thelen 2012: 398, Gupta and Ferguson 1997). As the anthropologist Sian Lazar (2012: 353) says so pointedly, with the crisis of representation, the baby (comparison as method) was thrown out with the bathwater (positivism and objectivity). These scholars find this problematic, as the production of anthropological knowledge is based on all sorts of comparisons. The question is less about whether we compare and rather about "*what kind of recognition* [italics in original] scholars give to this basic human activity" (Fox and Gingrich 2002: 20). If anthropology wants to be a self-reflexive science, comparison needs to be included in methodological and epistemological debates. Thinking about comparison is more than merely reflecting on a certain method; it also entails reflecting on anthropological knowledge in general.

Besides these epistemological arguments there is also ample recognition that globalisation and the increasing entangledness of spaces and places across the globe demand comparisons: "These global connections and the heterogeneous local responses to them legitimate a renewed comparative agenda for anthropology and related fields" (ibid: 7). Because of increased global connectedness, it is not only researchers but also practitioners who engage in comparisons, for example there are urban planners working in municipalities and politicians who readily adopt urban policies developed in other cities (Ward 2010). As people across the globe become subjected to similar processes and models, it is necessary to compare how actors engage differently or similarly to them. A very practical argument for renewed comparison is research funding. In countries such as the United Kingdom and Switzerland, research funding institutions increasingly demand interdisciplinarity and collaboration (Lazar 2012: 353).

The second particularity shared across the interpretive, post-crisis approaches is that they find that comparison, even in its positivist version, has a subversive potential and can call existing knowledge and frameworks radically into question. By comparing 'civilised' and 'primitive' cultures, by explaining variations as cultural difference and denying the explanatory value of race and biology, Tylor made a strong political statement against Darwinism and racism (Yengoyan 2006: 140). Through comparison, Strathern (1997) critically investigated concepts like gender and dismantled them as not being culturally neutral but as emanating from the West. Goody (2006) also used comparison to show how concepts about society and history usually take Western societies as starting points. By comparing European civilisation with other histories, he dismantles the claim of the uniqueness of European civilisation and unsettles our understanding of European history.

It is therefore no coincidence that fields which aim to break established boundaries call for comparison: the ontological turn in anthropology and multi-species anthropology calls into question the centrality of humans as the only actors in a world also constituted by non-humans. In this debate, comparison, based on Strathern's writings, has become reassessed as a central tool for thinking about different ontologies. Tsing (2014), for example, develops a comparison in the form of a cultural analogy between mushrooms and human actors. In the field of postcolonial, critical urban studies, Robinson calls for comparison because it should contribute to the deprovincialisation of urban theory. Already the Manchester anthropologists researching the Copperbelt had critically scrutinised the theories of the Chicago school by researching cities comparatively but contemporary urban theory framing cities in the North and South as distinctly different forgot about these debates (Robinson 2006a: 5-7). By comparing

widely different cities we can decentre Eurocentric and America-centric notions of urbanity (Robinson 2006a, 2011).

The third particularity of this emerging field relates to the *how* of comparison. These scholars find that comparisons should be more experimental, more diverse and they should not let themselves be limited by outdated methodological ideas like incommensurability (Robinson 2011). In order to understand this methodological critique, one needs to scrutinise in more detail how positivist comparisons work. Positivist comparers firmly believe that comparisons are something that can fail. Failure happens, for example, because researchers make so-called 'category mistakes': they set off to study apples but find out that one of the apples is actually a pear. This is a serious problem for positivists because of their deductive approach aimed at testing theory. In positivist comparison, the process of data collection is the execution of a plan drafted at the beginning of the study, a theoretical framework is drawn up and is then 'filled' with data. For the positivist comparer, the initial design of the comparison is absolutely crucial; this is where she, informed by theories, develops hypotheses which she then tests. As this initial framework is like a fixed shell, it is possible to make mistakes in the construction. The data may not fit (category mistakes), or the data may be overly different (incommensurable).

Because positivist analytical frameworks are built to test theory and not thought to be adapted to empirical reality, they cannot easily replace the predefined category 'apples' with a broader category 'fruits'. Neither can they use the contradiction between reality and their category to reflect on what their initial misreading of the pear as an apple tells us about apples and fruits and our conceptualisations of them. This is why positivists are greatly concerned about sampling and comparability in the planning of the research.

Interpretive, post-crisis comparative approaches depart significantly from that. Category mistakes and apparently incommensurable difference are not seen as a failure of comparison but as a useful tool for thinking about our categories. All the different approaches included in this review, like the critical urban studies' call for comparison (Robinson 2006a, 2011), studies of citizenship (Handler 2009, Lazar 2012), comparisons inspired by Strathern (Holbraad and Pedersen 2009, Tsing 2014); and Detienne (2008 [2000]), claim that we should expand our horizon to compare things which have previously been perceived as incommensurable. Abolishing the idea that the things compared must somehow be similar is an important aspect of unsettling the canon of positivist comparison (Nader 1994: 87). Robinson (2011) criticises the fact that assumptions of fundamental incommensurability of different kinds of cities have limited comparative research on urbanity (ibid: 2). By calling for cities to be treated as 'ordinary', she proposes experimentation with comparisons across widely different contexts (Robinson 2006a, 2011).

Lazar (2012) coins the useful notion of *disjunctive comparison*. In disjunctive comparison, two quite different 'things' are placed next to another (Strathern 2002: xvi) so that the data thus placed can talk to each other (Lazar 2012: 351). With the notion of disjunction she signals that the conviction of post-crisis comparers like Detienne (2008 [2000]) and Handler (2009) that it is possible and interpretively productive to compare 'things' which have very little in common and which would have been considered incommensurable by positivist comparers. Strathern is "perhaps the mistress of disjunctive comparison" (Lazar 2012: 351) as she compares, for example, contemporary

gender relations in 'Euro-America' today with gender in Melanesia in the 1970s (Strathern 1997).

The fourth particularity of interpretive approaches to comparison is their call to move away from comparing fixed units towards comparing practices and processes. What do we actually compare? How are the 'things', or the 'units of comparison' constituted? Anthropological cross-cultural comparison was long thought to work across collectives, meaning "social groups conceptualised, roughly, as species are conceptualised in the natural sciences", like nation-states, cultures, societies, tribes or races (Handler 2009: 628-9, see also Moore 1993). These apparently naturally existing things with clear boundaries and internal coherence were thought of as units of analysis. The positivistic comparers took their 'objects' of study as things which are simply given and could be compared. With the epistemological turn, however, social facts were no longer regarded as things but as constructions (Holý 1987b: 15). Abu-Lughod famously argued that the notion of culture in anthropology is an "essential tool for making other" (Abu-Lughod 1991: 470). Cross-cultural comparative methods became regarded with high suspicion as they compared 'cultures', assumed to be stable, highly integrated and self-contained (Fox and Gingrich 2002: 2). So comparers who take the crisis of representation and the deconstruction of notions like cultures as essentialist seriously are confronted with the need to reformulate and rethink what they actually compare. It is important to acknowledge that objects of comparison are socially constructed (Scheffer 2008: 283). Fox and Gingrich argue that units of comparison should not be "accepted as discrete, homogenous and stable entities at all", but they should be understood as "differentiated, changing results of wider developments, within their fuzzy boundaries" (Fox and Gingrich 2002: 19). Many claim that we should study processes instead of outcomes (Moore 2005, Strathern 1981, Robinson 2011). Building on these insights on what a renewed anthropological approach to comparison may look like, in the next section I will outline the way in which the comparative fieldwork for this book evolved, advocating for a style of comparison which is circular and takes into account the deeply subjective side of comparative ethnography which calls for reflexivity.

The Biographies of Units of Comparison

The philosopher Ralph Weber (2014) draws attention to an often neglected aspect of debates around comparison by pointing out that comparisons have a temporal dimension. At the beginning of a comparative research project, in the 'pre-comparative moment', the researcher develops a *pre-comparative third*, a heuristic idea of what the cases should be cases *of*; she also develops *comparanda*, namely the things she aims to compare, and plans data collection accordingly. During the comparative moment, the researcher collects data, engages in data analysis, produces generalisations and compares them. The post-comparative moment refers to the end products of the comparative project, for example the written-up published article or written-up chapters of a theses. Here, the final *comparata* and the final *post-comparative third* are represented through the writing or the presentation of tables.

Understanding comparison as a process and not solely as a moment is very useful for comparative ethnography. Yet Weber's linear understanding is inadequate for a methodology grounded in induction where the relationship between concepts and

data is one of circularity. Comparative ethnography needs to be understood as a circular process, with the mind and body of the ethnographer involved in constant comparisons along the way – comparisons taking place in the field, in the re-reading of the data, in the process of writing up. The 'thirds' (what it is a case *of*, the overarching themes or concepts) and the 'cases' (units of analysis, *comparata*, things) change constantly over time, involving "constant critical reflection by the researcher as well as a delicate balance of both immersion into and distance from social reality" (Förster 2011: 13). Thirds and cases may even be different in each written-up article, each chapter or even each subchapter, emerging from the ethnographic research process. Instead of thinking about comparison as moments with a pre- and post-phase, I suggest the notion of *biography* be mobilised in order to speak about the temporality of comparative projects. This is inspired by Scheffer and Niewöhner (2008: 281), who argue that interpretive comparison demands a reflective stance by the comparer towards the *biographies of comparables*, namely, how things and thirds were "produced, defined, traced, employed and dismissed". They call for *thick comparisons*, hence grounded in thick description (Geertz 1983), which I also understand as a comparative attitude that entails critical self-reflection on the transformation of analytical frameworks, cases and thirds (*biography of comparables*) during the course of the project. In this section, I will therefore describe the biography of the units of comparison in this book. Thick comparison should also, though, as I argue in the following section, include critical self-reflection on one's involvement with the field, about how specificities of the field and the positionality of the people involved shaped comparative fieldwork.

Between 2010 and 2012 I spent 14 months doing fieldwork in Johannesburg and Maputo. This was divided into two months of preliminary study (January 2010 in Johannesburg, February 2010 in Maputo), a core field phase (September 2010 to January 2011 in Maputo, February 2011 to April 2011 in Johannesburg), and a follow-up study (April 2012 to June 2012 in Johannesburg, July and August 2012 in Maputo). Based on ethnographic methods like participation and observation (Förster 2001) and diverse forms of interviewing (Meuser and Nagel 2002, Spradley 1979, Wetherell 2003), I worked with the Emic Evaluation Approach, consisting of a triangulation of three different methodologies, namely, the mapping of actors and spaces, social discourse analysis and practice analysis (Förster et al. 2011, Heer 2011). Moving between Switzerland, South Africa and Mozambique several times meant constantly moving between immersion, literature review, writing and adaptation of fieldwork focus.

My initial interest in urban spaces was sparked by a debate in my home city of Basel in the summer of 2009 when I was writing my research proposal. The head of the urban development department of the City of Basel stated in an interview in the local press that the youth culture of barbecuing sausages on the Rhine riverbank harmed the city's image and that the 'cultural niveau' needed to be raised (Loser 2009). This polemic sparked a debate in the city on how and by whom the public spaces along the Rhine should be used, how urban society evaluated certain lifestyles, and who had the power and resources to turn their image of the good city into a social reality. Power, social diversity, morality and politics seemed to culminate in public spaces. When I started reading on public spaces, I became aware of ongoing debates about the privatisation and commodification of public spaces in the 'postmodern' era in cities across Europe (Selle 2002), the US (Davis 2006 [1990], Low and Smith 2006), Brazil (Caldeira 2000) and Africa (Murray 2004). I was initially interested in cities and urban spaces,

and the selection of the cities as research settings only came after that. I decided to do fieldwork in Maputo because I wanted to get to know Lusophone Africa and make use of my Portuguese skills which I had acquired a long time ago in an exchange year in Brazil. One of my PhD supervisors, Till Förster, inspired by Robinson's (2006a) call for comparative urbanism, suggested a comparison with Johannesburg, not least because questions of the privatisation of public space were especially relevant there (Bremner 2006, Dirsuweit 2007, Parnell 1997, Peyroux 2006). I was familiar with South Africa, as I had spent an exchange semester at Rhodes University.

In 2010, during a preliminary study of two months, my intention was to get to know as many parts and spaces of the city as possible, using methods like 'go-alongs'[2] (Kusenbach 2003) and exploratory walks and drives.[3] My aim was also to get an overview of diverse, more or less public spaces in the two cities, and in some of these spaces I experimented with systematic observation, a non-participatory form of observation (Beer 2003). In addition, I simply spent lots of time in shopping malls and bars, and in Maputo also in public squares and parks. At the time I was inspired by what I call the *public space approach*, a research methodology used by anthropologists like Setha Low (2000), Kathrin Wildner (2003) and others which takes the material, architectural public space as a starting point for the ethnography. In their studies, both Low and Wildner describe a specific public space and the social practices and specific events emerging in them, and they interpret their case within the broad context of the city, of the society and of the nation at large. Both Wildner and Low chose central places with high symbolic meaning for the city: the Zócalo in Mexico (Wildner 2003) and two plazas in Costa Rica (Low 2000). When I was back in Basel after this preliminary study, I wondered which of the many public spaces I had mapped in both cities I should focus on and include in the 'sample' for my comparison. This proved to be a complicated question.

In Johannesburg, I had learnt that for many urban dwellers from townships and suburbs, the spaces in the inner city do not form part of everyday routes. For affluent milieus in particular, the inner city had become a 'no-go' zone and they preferred to spend their leisure time in shopping malls in the suburbs. In Maputo, however, the downtown area (Baixa) had retained its function as a centre for the majority of urban dwellers, despite being experienced by better-off milieus as chaotic and exhausting. If I were to compare an inner-city public space in Johannesburg with one in Maputo, I would compare two architectural spaces which, from a social point of view, could have totally different social meanings for totally different urban milieus. I felt that the public spaces I thought I needed to select at this early stage of research, without yet understanding much of what was going on these spaces, would greatly influence *whose* public spaces and *whose* city I would write about.

2 Go-alongs are 'naturally' occurring situations rooted in everyday routines, which are influenced but not determined by the presence of the anthropologist (unlike in exploratory walks). They basically entail participation and observation on the move (Kusenbach 2003).

3 In exploratory walks, the anthropologist moves through the city similarly to the literary figure of the flaneur (Benjamin and Tiedemann 1982), familiarises herself with the complex urban environments by perceiving as much as possible with heightened senses. By walking, the anthropologist creates an encounter between herself, the materiality of the city and the rhythms, atmospheres, orders, noises, smells, actors and other aspects of everyday life on the streets, mediated through her senses (Magnani 1996: 16-17, Paasche and Sidaway 2010: 1556, Wildner 2003: 7).

In addition, being a newcomer to both cities, I felt that I was not able to interpret the data I had collected by observing and participating in the life in these public spaces. Looking through my fieldnotes back home in Basel, I realised that by merely hanging around in public space I would not be able to understand what role these spaces played in people's everyday lives. I had no idea how the people I talked to at the malls, in the bars and the squares lived, what their everyday routines looked or how the space where I met them inserted itself into their routines. When re-reading Wildner (2003) and Low (2000) I became aware that in their ethnographies, the everyday urban lives of the users of these spaces were lacking, which meant that my difficulties were not so much related to the fact that I was at an early stage of my PhD but that it was a problem of the methodology. A complicating factor was also that the management of Maputo Shopping gave me research permission to conduct research *in* the mall, but they forbade me from re-visiting interviewees at their homes or somewhere else *outside of* the mall. This meant that I could not accompany mallgoers back to their homes and everyday lives. Accordingly, the *public space approach* seemed more and more inadequate to me, as I completely lacked the contextual knowledge to interpret what I observed in these spaces.

In both Johannesburg and Maputo, I was immediately drawn in the lifeworlds of urbanites of my age who had university degrees and were working in the public sector or for large companies. Making friends with them was easy, as we shared a similar background and without much effort I got to know their places of leisure, their homes and ways of moving through the city. The snowball approach, meeting new people through my existing friends, rapidly created a bias towards the urban experience of middle-class milieus. As I was interested in how urban dwellers deal with urban difference and inequality, I did not like the idea of restricting myself to one urban milieu and essentially to one perspective on the urban.

After a lot of reflection, I decided to temporarily move away from the public spaces: I wanted, instead, to look at urbanites' daily lives and hear and observe when and where they actually meet other people because I thought this was what my interest in public space was all about. I wanted to switch from being a sole interviewer and outside observer to becoming a participant, somebody who accompanied urban dwellers in their lives and on their visits to public spaces. With that, the biography of my thirds took an important turn. My preliminary concept changed from 'public space' to 'public life', by which I understood the part of life that happens in the 'public', defined as the sphere of urban life where one meets people with whom one is not linked through kinship or other kinds of close personal relations (Lofland 1973, Sennett 1983 [1974]: 16). I also decided to do what many urban ethnographers have done before me, namely, to use neighbourhoods as an entry point, as spaces of immersion in everyday life, where I hoped that it would be easier to participate in everyday life and establish familiarity than in the anonymous public spaces.

Neighbourhoods are one of the preferred units of analysis for urban ethnographers. The first version of a neighbourhood approach was developed by the ancestors of urban anthropology, the Chicago School of Sociology. A neighbourhood approach basically means that one draws the boundary of the study, the limits of the field, according to the administratively or otherwise defined boundaries of a neighbourhood. In both cities, Johannesburg and Maputo, I chose two neighbourhoods as a starting point for my research, neighbourhoods which on the one hand exemplified the large urban divi-

sions shaping these cities, and on the other hand were situated right next to each other. On the one hand, this was for practical reasons, so that I could save travel time and visit informants in both neighbourhoods on the same day. And on the other hand, the constellation of spatial proximity and large social differences seemed like an ideal setting for finding answers to my key interest, namely, how urban dwellers deal with the large differences and inequalities in everyday life.

Assisted by research assistants (see below), I explored the neighbourhoods on foot or by car and I asked people to take me to different places which were important in their daily lives. This eventually led to a general mapping of the neighbourhood and some of its places with importance for public life. The other important starting points were qualitative interviews with different residents about their everyday life, their spatial trajectories through the city, their perceptions of their own and the other neighbourhood, and so on. In each neighbourhood, I interviewed about ten to fifteen residents with a qualitative question guide, which I continuously reworked and adjusted to include new topics and new spaces that previous interviewees had brought up. The interviews covered basic data about biography, livelihood, engagement in neighbourhood organisations, neighbour relations, their daily routine, modes of transport and many other topics. I also asked specifically about the frequency, use and perception of places that previous interviewees had mentioned, like shopping malls, parks, the inner city, bars and religious spaces. Sometimes I asked them to show on a city map where their everyday trajectories took them to and often, I showed them photographs of places, which inspired interviewees to tell stories. In Alexandra, I asked a couple of friends to keep a diary of their everyday routines (Zimmerman and Wieder 1977), based on which we had long conversations. These diaries gave me new, unexpected insights into their everyday life, like the fact that some households in Alexandra re-use paper towels from Sandton's toilets as toilet paper (see chapter 2). My lengthy and repeated presence in the neighbourhoods had the advantage of slowly building up rapport with various urban dwellers, the advantage of being able to visit them repeatedly, of hanging out in places where the regulars started to know us. Restricting my attention for a couple of months to one neighbourhood allowed me to develop a more in-depth picture of a section of these metropolises.

With time, my attention was drawn to topics and spaces where the everyday lives of residents of the two neighbourhoods intersected. In Maputo, I was fascinated by the stories people told us about the road closures which members of the elite had apparently built and residents of Polana Caniço had destroyed. The Maputo Shopping Centre crystallised as a key place of public life for residents from Sommerschield II, and I learnt that residents of Polana Caniço also had interesting stories about their mall visits to share. In Johannesburg I found out that Linbro Park residents were worrying about their futures, about when public housing for Alexandra residents would be built. I started to accompany people as much as possible to activities related to these points of intersections, so I went with friends to the mall, attended meetings of the Linbro Park Community Association (LPCA) and hung out at the LRC Church.

Back in Basel after this lengthy second field trip, the biography of the thirds and case studies took another turn. When analysing data on the themes and the spaces where the trajectories of the urban dwellers from both neighbourhoods and milieus intersected, I came to understand them as *spaces of encounter*, hence spaces where urban dwellers come to engage with each other. During the last field visit, I focused my

research activities even more on such spaces of encounters. For example, I returned to shopping malls for systematic observation but now, in contrast to the beginning of the fieldwork, I had the necessary contextual knowledge to actually understand what was going on in them socially. I had been to the mall many times in the company of mall users, they had shared their stories about mall visits with me, and I knew their lives outside of the mall.

In this circular process of adapting concepts and focus to the emerging data, a threefold focus emerged which I call the *multi-sited neighbourhood approach*: starting from unequal yet adjacent neighbourhoods, following (Marcus 1995) urbanites across the city, and then focusing on spaces of encounter, the sites and themes where the lives of my informants from the adjacent neighbourhoods became entangled. This threefold focus allowed me to zoom in on several cases and themes which emerged from the fieldwork and which seemed relevant to the specificity of the localities yet also enabled comparisons.

Unlike in classical community studies where neighbourhood boundaries are used to delimit the case studies, in this comparative ethnography neighbourhoods rather served as heuristic starting points and as a "window to complexity" (Candea 2009: 37). Initially, I believed that the neighbourhoods would have the role of *arbitrary locations* (ibid), arbitrarily chosen entry points to study urban complexity. It was for me an empirically open question as to whether they were really existing social formations or merely urban quarters drawn on a map by urban planners with little significance for the everyday lives of the urban dwellers. It was, hence, never my intention to actually compare neighbourhoods. Over time, however, I became aware of how, for many of my informants, their neighbourhoods were important places of belonging and many of their activities that I documented, especially concerning neighbourhood governance and politics, actually contributed to creating this sense of belonging. Besides being geographical places and arbitrary locations for me as researcher, the neighbourhoods also turned out to be what Förster (2013a: 8) calls 'intentional objects', namely, shared images which "orient actors toward specific content". As such intentional objects it would be interesting to compare the four neighbourhoods.

When writing the PhD manuscript for submission to the university, I developed a framework called *spaces of encounter* (Heer 2015a) in which the comparisons did not so much involve the cities but the case studies of the spaces of encounter. Only when rewriting the manuscript for publication did I come across the notion of entanglements in Srivastava's (2014) work, and the geographer Sophie Oldfield pointed me towards Nuttall's book (2009), which allowed me to formulate *cities of entanglements* as a more overarching framework in which the cities as such also came into view. Up to now, this has been the last step in the biography of the units of comparison and thirds. However, if I were to continue working on the material, I have no doubt that new theoretical frameworks, more sophisticated thirds and quite different units of comparisons would emerge. This is very typical of a circular and interpretive research process. An interpretive comparer starts off with tentative sensitising concepts, which are then continuously adapted. What the research is a *case of* is often unclear until the very end (Ragin 1994: 121). *What* I was comparing and how I was analytically framing it has hence been constantly changing, and this fluidity and circularity of data collection and analysis is a specificity of comparative ethnography. The comparisons written up, the comparative arguments made, the similarities and differences implicitly or

explicitly pointed out in this book are, thus, just a few among the many comparisons comparative fieldwork enables us to do. Like any other form of research, comparative ethnography is never finished and always imperfect.

The Entangled Comparer

An extremely important epistemological difference between *thinking cities through elsewhere*, which I understand here as comparing one's case study by reading other people's cases or by comparing data collected by others, and *experiencing cities through elsewhere*, that is, comparative ethnography as fieldwork conducted by a single researcher in at least two places, lies in the role of the comparer. The comparer, that is, the person who conducts the comparison, has received little attention in methodological reflections on comparisons, which is a problem, as the comparer is the key locus, if not to say the embodiment of the comparison. Actually, it is through the comparer – her body, her experience, her analysis, her writing – that the two or more fields become fundamentally entangled. The comparer is herself an actor who renders the two places more connected by moving between the two places, by bringing people from both places in contact with each other, and by being present in at least two academic fields. Focusing attention on the role of the comparer reveals that knowledge production in comparative ethnography becomes deeply shaped by the positionality of the comparer and her research assistants, the manifold relationships that emerge during fieldwork, and the many specificities of the urban contexts.

Positionality and Politics

Since the crisis of representation in the 1980s and the epistemological and political shifts since the 1960s, reflexivity has increasingly become a marker of good quality ethnography. During thick description, the ethnographer should give an account about her personal and culturally moulded attitudes, perceptions and conceptions. The ethnographer needs to be aware of herself as a historical subject (Förster 1997: 39). This should also be so for comparative ethnography: comparers have to reflect on their positionality (Melas 2007: 3) and give an account of the diverse relationships that shaped the research process and, hence, knowledge production. For this, I again mobilise the notion of entanglement, drawing on its use by feminist researchers from the field of political ecology. Entanglements draw attention to the way in which researchers themselves are "situated in and often beneficiaries of the very politico-economic systems under consideration in our research" (Sundberg 2015: 117). Rather than seeing the comparer as an actor standing at a distance from the data, producing objective conclusions, the comparer should be seen as standing in multiple and mostly asymmetric relationships with informants, relationships deeply shaped by the manifold specificities of the urban context and, in the case of researchers from the North and from privileged backgrounds, often benefiting from the same hierarchies they describe and criticise in their work.

Comparison involves power relations and responsibility. Following Hobart, "relations of similarity and difference are not given in the empirical phenomena themselves but are generated by the people who act on them and decide, using criteria of their own choosing, to which class, category or concept they conform" (Hobart 1987, Holý 1987b:

16). Representation and comparison of other cultures entails intellectual and academic hierarchies, as the critique of comparison in the 1980s pointed out, and post-crisis comparison therefore has to reflect on the power relations and public responsibility of comparers (Fox and Gingrich 2002: 9). Nader famously argued that anthropology needs a comparative consciousness, meaning that anthropologists need to be more conscious and responsible about the comparisons they conduct (Nader 1994: 89). But new forms of comparison, she claims, have to cope with questions of process and hegemony, which is not easy. One has to acknowledge that comparison involves the negotiation of unequal power relations "between and among the networks and processes of social actors under study, the author(s), and the audience of readership" (Fox and Gingrich 2002: 19). One's position in social hierarchies at home and in the field, the social milieu in which one grew up and in which one writes, the scientific training one has received, the university where one is based all shape the anthropological gaze.

I come from a family of teachers and I grew up in rural Switzerland. Finding this Swiss valley too narrow, I went abroad, first for a school exchange year in Brazil, later for an internship in India, and during my studies in anthropology and gender studies I spent a semester at Rhodes University in South Africa. In Brazil, India and South Africa I was confronted with what I experienced as extreme, violent inequality between social classes, culturally and racially defined groups, while I had easy access to a privileged social position in the social structure. How people deal with such inequality has hence been a question that troubles me, ethically, politically and empirically. This question did not arise because I did not know inequality from Switzerland. Actually, as the child of secondary school teachers, who constituted part of the local elite in this rural part of Switzerland, I grew up in a house on a hill looking down on the high-rise buildings where the worker families lived. Living a life which I felt was privileged was as much part of my upbringing as the social and feminist values that my parents lived in their work as teachers and as active members and leaders of civil society organisations.

While my milieu and biography have certainly shaped my outlook on the world, my research interests and hence my comparisons, the comparative research process, in turn, has had lasting effects on me. When I started my PhD, I joined the feminist section of the social democratic party in Basel-Stadt, the city that I moved to in order to study and where I now live. In 2018 I became a member of parliament in the City of Basel, so that I am now (also) a politician. My political outlook in Basel is deeply coloured by my experiences in Maputo and Johannesburg. I agree with Sundberg when she calls for an *ethics of entanglement*, by which she means that researchers should "be involved in the struggle for a just world from and in our own sites of entanglement and engagement" (Sundberg 2015: 123). What I do not agree with, however, is when academics believe that they can change the world through knowledge production alone. As I argued in the conclusion, the fact that entanglements are blind fields, unrecognised aspects of urban and human reality, is not just a question of a lack of knowledge or research gaps but is about the denial of responsibility towards others by more powerful groups, it is about not *wanting* to see. Filling research gaps and presenting our results to broader audiences is hence not enough for an engaged anthropology, I contend. Directing the futures of cities is about power struggles between different future visions, and if anthropologists want to be involved in the struggle for a just world, they have to become part and parcel of these struggles, bringing their analysis

into these struggles, and not just sit as apparently neutral experts on the side lines (Scheper-Hughes 1993). There are many routes to how academics working at universities can do this, for example by raising their voices in ongoing public debates, or by working with or being active in NGOs that do advocacy work.

Fieldwork in Webs of Relationships

Neely and Nguse (2015) propose the notion of entanglements to "think through how researchers' and research subjects' relational positionalities shape knowledge" (142), and how "research is entangled in a web of relationships" (141), ranging from relationships with the informants and research assistants, friendships we make during fieldwork, supervisors, colleagues and so on. Research and positionality emerge from interactions and both the researchers' and their interlocutors' positionalities shape knowledge production. For comparative ethnography, it is important that the comparer makes transparent the entanglements under which the data were collected because this renders the process of knowledge production open to scrutiny by the reader (see also Ammann, Kaiser-Grolimund and Staudacher 2016). One key set of entanglements is the relationship between researcher and research assistants which profoundly shapes the development of rapport with other urban dwellers. Throughout the fieldwork I worked with three research assistants with different personalities, different resources and, most importantly, different positions within the local landscapes. In Maputo, I had the pleasure of working with Fernando Tivane, himself an anthropologist. He had just finished his licentiate (*licenciatura*) at Eduardo Mondlane University (Tivane 2010) and was working as a lecturer in anthropology and doing his master's thesis. He eventually became a colleague, key informant, co-researcher, co-analyser and close friend. Almost all the research activities in the neighbourhoods of Maputo we did together and when I was back home, he transcribed the interviews.

Being a XiShangana speaker who had moved from Gaza province to Maputo as a child, he could more easily establish rapport with residents from Polana Caniço than I could. He was, however, not an insider to the neighbourhood, firstly because he was living in a different neighbourhood, Laulane, and secondly, as an anthropologist working at the university he belonged to a different milieu. Appearing in people's yards and the neighbourhood streets always together, as a European and an African anthropologist, was not only well received but many residents of Polana Caniço saw this as a colonial relation complicated by the fact that I was a white woman employing a black man. Hence, Fernando and I rather downplayed my origins from a European university and the hierarchy in our relation. We showed our research credentials from Eduardo Mondlane University, signed by the neighbourhood secretary, and we presented ourselves as a team of researchers, not as an anthropologist and her research assistant. Some people suspected that we were lovers, as it was apparently difficult to imagine a different relationship between a man and a woman, something which caused some complications for Fernando who was getting married at that time.

The lives of the elite milieus living in Sommerschield II were just as unknown to Fernando as they were to me. In the conversations with the affluent residents it was sometimes helpful to emphasise my connection to a European university, as the residents associated everything European with prestige. In addition, by emphasising that the information they gave us was destined for a PhD written abroad, we could instil the trust in these influential politicians, public servants or company managers that

we were not journalists or spies who would use the knowledge to harm them or expose their private lives in the local public sphere. Some had studied in Europe themselves and nostalgically remembered these times in their conversations with us. So, in contrast to Polana Caniço, where my European origin was rather a hinderance, in Sommerschield II we could use it as a door opener. In Polana Caniço, Fernando could more easily establish rapport, in Sommerschield II both of us were strangers.

In Alexandra, I worked with Thabo Mopasi, a 40-year-old Southern Sotho-speaking Alexandra resident and member of the long-term tenant milieu, who had been involved in many projects on the township and often introduced outsiders like me, mostly researchers and journalists, to Alexandra. Thabo was a great gatekeeper to local community leaders and other well-connected residents, and he had a thorough knowledge of and involvement in the township's history and politics. Alexandra is a place with a lot of everyday violence, from the private realm of the household (domestic violence, sexual abuse) to public spaces (violent muggings, rape and murder, car hijackings). Unlike Polana Caniço with its narrow paths, Alexandra has mostly tarred roads and orientation is easy due to the grid pattern (except from the shack settlements). Although I soon felt comfortable walking around on my own, Thabo and others fiercely insisted and without tolerating exception that I should not do that. Unlike in Maputo where Fernando and I spent lots of time on the neighbourhood streets, sitting at bars observing neighbourhood life, in Alexandra, I rather hung out 'inside', so at Thabo's office at San Kopano community centre, at Thabo's in-laws' yard, or at other friends' houses. As a well-known and engaged personality, and a fervent ANC activist, Thabo had his own agenda regarding what my research should be about, namely township politics, while I also wanted to get to know less high-profile aspects of township life. With time, I was able to build up relationships with people beyond Thabo's social world, and I became more independent by driving around in the township on my own, which, in contrast to walking around alone, my friends considered safe for me.

During my third stay in Johannesburg I got to know Nnana, the daughter of a domestic worker employed in Linbro Park. She was living with her mother in River Park, a section of Alexandra constructed in the 1990s, situated on the eastern border of the township and in geographical proximity to Linbro Park as well as the Greenstone area. Nnana grew up with her sister in a rural area while her mother had moved to Johannesburg in the 1980s to work as a domestic worker in Linbro Park. The life of her family has for many years been tightly entangled with the life of her employers. In contrast to Thabo, an insider with dense social networks and knowledge of Alexandra, Nnana and her family were outsiders, shack dwellers who constantly moved between their rural 'home' and Johannesburg, depending on where life is cheaper and where they find employment. By accompanying Nnana in her everyday life, I came to see Alexandra through the eyes of a newcomer with few social networks, with comparatively little knowledge of the township, and who was scared and insecure about moving through the township. Without Nnana, I believe, my take on township life would have been considerably different.

Linbro Park was the only neighbourhood where I went around on my own, without a research assistant, because I could easily establish rapport with the suburban residents of whom many had migrated from Europe or at least had family members there. In the interviews, most Linbro Park property owners were very friendly and informal, and they signalled that, although I was not a South African, they nevertheless saw me

as a fellow 'white'. Many affluent residents were nevertheless also suspicious that as an anthropologist, I would write about them in critical or negative terms, and they were worried that I might judge their way of life. Irving Goffman's writings about performances are very helpful for understanding such interview situations in which actions or attitudes which are inconsistent with broader societal ideals, for example sensitive issues like social differences, inequality and cultural, racial or ethnic others, are discussed (Goffman 1959, Wetherell 2003). Interviews should not be analysed only in terms of what is said, but as social situations in which actors do things with words (Keesing and Strathern 1998: 40). Interviews do not produce 'objective', raw data, but are interactions in which interviewee and interviewer jointly engage in the construction of social reality (Sarangi 2003: 65-67). Both the researcher and the interviewee engage in self-presentation (Goffman 1959). In my conversations and interviews with property owners in Linbro Park I avoided talking extensively about my involvement in the adjacent township because it would have confirmed their suspicions that I would write about them critically and because being "seen as a member of the ingroup or outgroup can easily influence what is said and how something is said" (Sarangi 2003: 67).

In conversations with domestic workers in Linbro Park, sharing stories about my fieldwork in Alexandra helped to build trust. Building relationships with them demanded patience, as they initially placed me within their social landscape as an employer or they believed I was the daughter of an employer. Something similar happened sometimes when I met female township dwellers in Alexandra who worked in the suburbs as domestics. Some of them activated the registers typical of domestic worker–employer interactions. They talked to me if I were a potential employer, using a specific, for me artificial sounding, tone of voice, signalling obedience and friendliness. In order not to be seen as a white suburbanite and potential employer, it again helped to emphasise that I was an anthropologist from Europe. Unlike in Polana Caniço, where being a European researcher raised suspicion, in Alexandra residents valued it as something positive to have a foreign researcher writing about the township, not least because many proud township dwellers aspire for 'Alex' to become better known to the wider word, like Soweto already is. Being white, however, also meant being seen as wealthy. Thabo and his family received social pressure to share the money that their neighbours thought I was giving them.

One of the most striking differences between fieldwork in Johannesburg and in Maputo is that while in Johannesburg I was often seen as a somehow exotic stranger, who was potentially interesting as a tool to make one's experiences and views known to a wider world, in Maputo relating to me as a stranger was somewhat troubling for many of the people we met, as if it entailed many social risks for them. Would I make money from the photographs I took of Polana Caniço's streets? Would I do damaging things with the information they were giving me? Many people were initially worried that I was a spy or a journalist. While in Johannesburg, I felt that people were relatively open toward strangers, in Maputo, I experienced social closure and low levels of social trust. It took significantly more time to get access to people's networks in Maputo. Fernando and I were rarely invited to political or social events in Polana Caniço or Sommerschield II, and even my very close friends took their time before they invited me to family gatherings. To give an example, in Johannesburg phone numbers are almost public knowledge, lists of residents' phone numbers are put up on websites or sent around via e-mail, and people gave me the phone numbers of friends or neighbours

without hesitation. In Maputo, phone numbers are something very private which people believe they are only allowed to pass on to others if the owner of the number has given permission. Sharing one's contacts with others is dangerous, as one could pass on the social risk embodied by the stranger to a member of one's network, which could damage the relationship. In many such instances in Johannesburg, I felt that people shared their social capital with me in order to make their networks grow, whilst in Maputo I experienced that social capital was rather seen as something which could decrease if they shared it with me.

Distinct communication styles also went along with these city-specific ways of relating to strangers. In Maputo, I observed that politeness was extremely important in stranger interactions, and urban dwellers' initial interactions with me tended to be reserved and cautious. In terms of body language, it often felt as if the person would incline their upper body away from me in order to protect their personal space. I learnt that I had to be patient while building relationships. Silence, rather than asking many curious questions, could ease the tension in a first encounter. In Johannesburg, in contrast, informality and friendliness characterised the first interactions and being verbally present was important, as by speaking people establish rapport and hierarchy. If people were suspicious or had fears, they would hide them behind talking a lot and performing friendliness. In conversations people often asked me many questions first and started to tell me things they thought I should be interested in without necessarily waiting for my questions. Such city-specific ways of relating to strangers significantly shaped the research process and I had to adapt my ways of interacting with people depending on where I interacted with them.

While communication styles and levels of social trust differed across the two cities, other local aspects which shaped the research differed across neighbourhoods and milieus. Sommerschield II and Linbro Park, where affluent milieus were living, were both characterised by a strict temporal and spatial separation of private and public spheres exemplified by the residents' everyday rhythms of leaving for work in the morning and coming back only at night to retreat into their walled homes. Their core social relations were not so much centred on the neighbourhood but extended to other affluent areas in the city, which they often visited by car. In these two affluent neighbourhoods, fieldwork was largely anthropology by appointment, we rang people's door bells or called them to make an appointment, and there was little public life in the neighbourhood we could participate in. In contrast, in Polana Caniço and Alexandra, many urbanites make a living from informal economic activities, and many economic and social activities took place within the neighbourhood public spaces during the day, giving me more opportunities to observe and participate. Many residents in these neighbourhoods depended considerably on their neighbours, ranging from sharing food in times of crisis to looking after each other's children. I could appear at people's houses without appointment and I could more easily participate in their everyday life. Another reason why access and participation were in general easier in the *bairro* and the township than in the suburb and the elite neighbourhood may also be related to the power relations present in 'studying down' and 'studying up'. While the elite milieus felt entitled to say no when I asked for an interview, members of poorer milieus may not always have felt empowered to defend their privacy against what some may have seen as an intrusion by an anthropologist. In addition, people with fewer resources

may have been more interested in building a relationship with me than elites, as some were initially hoping to get access to my money or networks.

Experiencing Cities through Elsewhere

The comparer plays a distinct role in the constitution of the knowledge through comparative ethnography. In the analytical comparison, working with data produced by others, hence *thinking cities through elsewhere*, the comparer is a potentially detached actor who, metaphorically sitting in an armchair, compares data accessible to her as text, be it raw data or written-up research produced by others. In the case of comparative ethnography conducted by a single person, engaged in *experiencing cities through elsewhere*, the comparer also has access to non-text data; the embodied and non-predicative experiences of fieldwork. Not all the data collected can be transformed into written fieldnotes. Many remain 'headnotes' (Ottenberg 1990), non-written memories of events, as well as incorporated knowledge, emotions and memories of smells and sensations, which have become inscribed in the comparer's body and which accompany her when she moves from one context to the other. These embodied aspects of research, non-written and pre-predicative memories and newly learnt habits of seeing and feeling are as much part of the data corpus and influence data analysis and writing, although in a different modality from the explicated data (Ottenberg 1990, Sanjek 2001: 266).

What distinguishes ethnography from other qualitative research methodologies is its focus on practice, instead of solely approaching everyday life through interviewing. Practice analysis aims to understand acts of ordinary life which are deeply embedded in habitual attitudes that actors are seldom aware of. The ethnographer can only grasp such non-predicative aspects of urban life by living there, by participating in it (Förster et al. 2011). Hence in comparative ethnography, the data and the comparer cannot neatly be separated, as the comparer-cum-fieldworker is also part of the data: fieldwork is an encounter and dialogue between two parties and ethnographic writing is a construction (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011 [1995]: 11). This also means that analysis does not start once one is back home but is a continuous process starting in the field (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

The ethnographer as a social, academic and embodied subject hence becomes shaped by the fieldwork experience in different contexts. I usually became conscious of such embodied aspects of the comparison shortly after I had travelled from one place to another. This excerpt from a field book entry was written when I had just moved to the Johannesburg suburb of Orange Grove after having lived in inner city of Maputo for five months.

> I notice that all the anecdotes or examples which I bring up in small talk have to do with Maputo. "In Maputo, many people don't have hot water" (which Gaby, my host mother could hardly believe); "in comparison to Maputo, traffic in Johannesburg is very organised", in Maputo this and that. The memories which I have in my mind and with which I compare Johannesburg in my everyday life are all related to Maputo, and not anymore to Switzerland. Sometimes I try not to talk about Maputo in order not to bore people. Now living in a Johannesburg suburb, I really do miss the busyness of Maputo's inner city where I was living before, the modernist high-rise buildings, the *kizomba* music, and even the polite reservation by strangers. Here, on the other hand, I feel less observed as a white woman on the suburban streets, people may look at me, but

> they will rarely talk to me. When I go jogging, my nose doesn't get irritated by a sharp smell of pee and I don't have to look down on the concrete to avoid stumbling over the cracked cement (from my field diary, translated from the German, January 2011, living in the formerly white suburb Orange Grove, first days after arrival from five months' fieldwork in Maputo).

The excerpt shows how my stock of knowledge, both cognitive and embodied, had become shaped by the experience of living in Maputo and had become the lens through which I encountered Johannesburg. Instead of relating the physical experience of living in the suburb Orange Grove to living in my everyday life in my hometown of Basel I was comparing it to Maputo. My own body became part of the comparison.

Living arrangements during fieldwork in the city considerably influence where and with whom one spends everyday life, what kind of routines one develops and gets to know, and how one experiences the city more generally. Yet it is not always possible to choose one's living arrangements entirely in a way which one thinks would be best for research. In Maputo, I wanted first to live in Polana Caniço, yet when I finally found a room with a family I only managed to stay there for two weeks, as the hygienic conditions were difficult. I also struggled to travel from the *bairro* to the inner city, together with all the other commuters, as the minibus taxis were full and I regularly lost in the competition for a seat. So, I a rented a small place (a *dependência*) in the city centre, and later I lived with a middle-class, *mestiço* family in an inner-city neighbourhood where I could move around freely in the evenings as well (which I could not do in the *bairro* where there were no street lights). In Johannesburg, I lived with middle-class migrants, a Zimbabwean and a Swazi family, in the suburb of Orange Grove, and on the last field visit I rented a room at a bed and breakfast in Linbro Park.

Once in Maputo I was mugged by a homeless person armed with a rusty knife at dawn in the inner city when I went for a walk with a friend. After that event, for quite some time, my body released adrenaline when I walked past a stranger on a Maputo street when the light was fading. In Linbro Park in April 2012, there was a spike in armed burglaries, which was widely shared on the neighbourhood Google group that I was following intensely at that time. Every day I read about the previous nights' successful or attempted break-ins, which also involved shoot-outs. The bed and breakfast in which I was staying was surrounded by an electric fence and guarded by ten dogs. Despite these measures, I had some restless nights, with adrenaline again pumping in my veins. Coming from safe Switzerland, I had never been a victim of crime before even though I had travelled extensively and lived abroad, and I have no doubts that my restless nights in Linbro Park were related to my body's memories of being mugged in Maputo. This 'extreme participation' (Heer 2011) changed my view on crime and security considerably, as it enhanced my ability to understand what it means to live in cities with higher crime rates than I was used to in Switzerland.

There were, nevertheless, considerable differences across the two cities in terms of security. Official crime rates and, equally important, as Hannerz (1981) points out, the perception of danger by urban dwellers is considerably lower in Maputo than in Johannesburg. In Maputo, I did not really believe the warnings by friends that living in Polana Caniço would be too dangerous for me, while in Alexandra, it was me who did not dare to live there, even though my field assistant, Thabo, wanted me to. But I did stay at Thabo's in-laws' house for two weeks, which helped me greatly to have a glimpse

of what it meant to live in the dense living conditions typical of the township. Staying with Thabo's family at least for this short time created a sense familiarity and intimacy with them and their neighbours in the yard, so that it became a long-term setting for 'deep hanging out' (Geertz 1998), for immersing myself in everyday life. I usually drove out of the township at dawn for security concerns, which limited my ability to participate in evening activities in the township.

My fieldwork involved many such switches from one social world to another, not only between the cities but also within the cities. In Maputo, there were days in which I woke up at the family home in Polana Caniço and in the evening I attended a fancy function in an upmarket bar. In Johannesburg, I drove daily from the quiet suburb to the bustling Alexandra township and back. Advocates of a purist form of ethnographic fieldwork would criticise that such multi-sitedness hinders deep immersion in the lifeworlds of urban dwellers from the four neighbourhoods, and this is also a doubt I had myself during fieldwork. Urban fieldworkers have long lamented the lack of a sense of a knowable social whole (Ferguson 1999: 18). With time, however, I realised that this daily switching between the different social worlds was not just an exotic practice of an anthropologist leading an unusual daily life in these cities. Indeed, I observed that this formed part of the everyday life of many of the urban dwellers as well. In Maputo, I learnt how many young women from the peripheral *bairros* dress up on the weekends and become part of the urban youth scene in fancy nightclubs. Some of my middle-class friends with university diplomas in their pockets set off to work in rural areas in the north of the country, worried about living conditions there. One of my hosts in Johannesburg was very happy to activate her networks for us to go clubbing in Soweto and Alexandra, as she was curious herself to expand her horizon in the city where she has been living for decades. Circulation (Simone 2005b), crossing everyday boundaries, is a quintessential urban practice, speaking about aspects of everyday urban life that research focusing on one public space, on one neighbourhood or on one milieu can seldom grasp.

When I moved back from staying at Thabo's in laws' house in Alexandra to the suburb of Orange Grove, I experienced something which my informants in the township had repeatedly told me in interviews and conversations, namely that they find the suburbs quiet. Back in my rented room in Orange Grove, I suddenly understood this, as I missed the noise of playing children and distant music, the smells of the neighbour's dinner terribly, and I found it absurd to have a large room all to myself, in a 150 square metre house inhabited by about four people including me. It was especially in such moments of change, of switching from one context to another, before my senses had had time to adapt to the new context, that my self was a comparative subject, experiencing Maputo against the backdrop of Johannesburg, or the suburb against the backdrop of the township. The longer I was in one place, the less my fieldnotes contained comparative remarks, and the more I dived into the realities of local living. Most ethnographers are familiar with this, as they may experience something similar during the first days after arriving in the field, when their most recent memories still concern their home country and when their attention is drawn to things because they are different from home. Yet I believe that for knowledge production, it does make a difference whether our apprehension of something as *different* results from an implicit comparison with our home country or whether it stems from an implicit comparison with

another research site. This touches not only the question of the production of anthropological knowledge, but also how objects of the anthropological gaze become formed.

Moving Comparative Ethnography Forward

Although anthropology was once founded on the application of comparative methodologies, since the crisis of representation and the paradigmatic shift from positivism to constructivism it has largely criticised comparison as an explicit method. Because of the resulting lack of interest in comparison, the positivist comparative methodologies have not yet been replaced by a new paradigm of interpretive comparative approaches in anthropology. There is a considerable degree of insecurity among anthropologists about what type of methodological requirements comparisons should fulfil nowadays. The revival of comparative methodologies induced by geographers like Robinson (2006) and, in the meantime, many others, should hence be embraced as an opportunity by anthropologists to dig deeper into the analytical, logistical, epistemological and methodological challenges which comparisons raise. This is because, on the one hand, anthropology is a thoroughly comparative endeavour yet has grossly neglected to consider what comparison means today, and on the other hand, because anthropology can, with its commitment to interpretivism and reflexivity, contribute important insights to the ongoing debate on comparative urbanism.

Up to now, Simone (2004a, 2010) has been recognised as the main contributor to comparative urbanism through ethnography (Robinson 2016b). Simone, however, has engaged little with questions of the *how* of comparative ethnography, by which I mean the methodological processes of data collection, analysis and writing. The long-past yet still important debates on representation in anthropology (Marcus and Fischer 1986) drew attention to the fact that the written-up research, the ethnography as a book, is a construction of other people's construction (Geertz 1973), a complex literary and academic genre, which can be quite distinct from the ethnographic research process that preceded it and within which the knowledge written down in the book was formed. This (ethnographic) research process of comparisons has not yet received enough scholarly attention by comparative urbanists, which is why this postscript aims to raise aspects that should contribute to filling this gap.

I have argued that reducing comparative urbanism to reading across contexts ('thinking cities through elsewhere') is a disappointing turn in the development of the debate because it neglects the potential of knowledge production through *experiencing* urban life in two cities. This postscript, therefore, focuses on the methodology of comparative ethnography, not so much in terms of the written-up analysis but more in terms of comparative fieldwork. It focuses on the circular process before the written-up text, namely, on how the comparisons come into being and the hands-on practical work of conducting a comparative research project as a single ethnographer. Thinking about comparisons in terms of the entangled comparer draws attention to the importance of positionality, reflexivity, the web of relationships and specificities of the urban context for the methodology, for the research process and knowledge production. Moving between Johannesburg and Maputo, between the four neighbourhoods, between social worlds and urban spaces, shaped the fieldwork in intricate ways, which dismantles expectations that some researchers schooled in other epistemolo-

gies may have for a solid comparative method, like the 'comparability' or 'replicability' of data. Fieldwork access, my relationships to research assistants and interviewees, my practices of immersion were deeply affected by, for example, neighbourhood-specific private–public boundaries and everyday temporal rhythms, so that not only the data but also the methodology itself became deeply shaped by the specificities of places and people. Comparative ethnography means that the entangled comparer has to constantly adapt herself to the emerging data and webs of relationships.

There are five strategies which I would like to suggest at the end of this book to deal with the dangers of comparison. One danger is the exaggeration of difference, the exoticising of other societies and the construction of units of comparisons as overly bounded, inherently consistent units with little interaction between them (Lazar 2012: 351). When arguing that "X is like this, while Y is like that" there is the inherent risk of creating dichotomies and overemphasising differences or similarities (Nader 1994: 92). In order to avoid essentialism and the construction of bounded units, anthropologists need to be conscious and responsible about comparison (Nader 1994). I suggest the following strategies: firstly, one should focus comparisons on social practices, discourses and social constructions instead of comparing 'wholes' like geographically defined places in order to avoid the trap of essentialism and boundedness (Abu-Lughod 1991). The second strategy of writing against essentialism is thick comparison. As I have argued before, comparers need to take account of the *biographies* of their units and themes which emerge in a circular rather than a linear process. Moments of disjunction, of apparent incommensurability, should be used as moments to push one's conceptualisation of what is going on further. The third strategy of avoiding the illusion of bounded units is by focusing on entanglements: Abu-Lughod (1991), Nader (1994), Robinson (2011) and others have argued for the inclusion of connections in the comparison, be they historical and contemporary, be they between the field sites to be compared, between the informants and the anthropologist, or between informants and the audience of the ethnography (Abu-Lughod 1991). The fourth strategy is to focus on differences within. As Strathern (1991) argues, differences are not only to be found between things; they are also constitutive of things and reside in them. Things are always composed of further things (Holbraad and Pedersen 2009: 374-5). Comparative ethnography hence does not always need to consists of a cross-cultural or cross-city comparison: describing similarities and differences within what we set off to compare is very important in order not to fall into the trap of bounding the cases too much. Last, but not least, as a fifth strategy, I contend that the main aim of comparative ethnography should not be to make comparative statements like "Maputo is like this and Johannesburg like that because of Z", but rather to develop descriptions which relate the case studies to each other in ways that also leave room for other interpretations, for not-yet-made comparisons and for the apprehension of the entanglements of manifold processes and complex causalities. The goal is to find a way of framing, of writing about Maputo and Johannesburg, which leaves room for the specificity of each city yet also speaks about cities in general. Rather than searching for data to fill in a pre-existing framework, the goal is to develop a framework which tries to do at least a little justice to the diversity and complexity of everyday urban life in two cities. *Cities of entanglements* hopes to have done that.