

4 Methodology

“Regardless of how the first-hand experiences are used in the text, we can assume that the arrival itself is an important experience. Any ethnographer would probably agree that first encounters generate personal alienation and a sense of extreme relativism that forever marks off the ‘field’. First experiences belong to an experiential space that cannot be done away with literary criticism” (Hervik 1994: 60).

During the fall of 2016 and the winter of 2019, I conducted fieldwork in Montreal and Jamaica in several periods and trips from one place to another. I first came to Montreal in the summer of 2016 to gain orientation knowledge in the city and to explore the local setting. However, I quickly realized that I had chosen the wrong part of town since I stayed in a designated Francophone area at the house of a dear colleague from the *Université de Montréal*. Before arriving in Montreal for the first time, I was unaware of the linguistic divide of the city that has effects on residential as well as on livelihood patterns. For my second trip to Montreal in the fall and winter months of 2016, I therefore chose a more central area close to Mount Royal, from which I could easily travel to the western neighbourhoods of the city that are predominantly Anglophone.

An essential part of my field research preparation and orientation knowledge acquisition was, what Hine calls, “virtual” ethnography (Hine 2000). As practical examples of cross-cultural exchange, various social media platforms, including Jamaican-Montreal-based Facebook groups were very useful in exploring the ‘virtual’ field. Here, those interested will find help with migration/ integration related questions, visa requirements/ procedures, or just practical information about grocery shops, Jamaican-owned businesses, and restaurants in Montreal. In addition, Jamaican musical events, radio stations, and upcoming Reggae/ Dancehall parties in town are shared on various social media platforms. Besides, users frequently add links to YouTube channels or video platforms with Jamaican news, music videos, comedy, or commercials. Information about the local Jamaican association in Montreal and its events are circulated and are part of a conversation among the chat participants. These technological spaces are anticipated and used daily. Further,

the ethnographic study had a “virtual” lens in the sense of following the interlocutors online on social media platforms, as well as planning and navigating mobility trips via modern communication forms, for example, via WhatsApp or Skype. Virtual networking with friends and family in Jamaica and other localities was often a precondition or a companion throughout mobility phases.

One of the aspects that “saved” the project from failing was my ability to speak basic Patois needed for conversations, especially to introduce myself to people in a language variant they were familiar with. Concerning events, an informal language policy exists, whereby events of the Jamaican community are advertised in English or Jamaican Patois, depending on the medium, i.e., Anglophone radio, media channels or their social media platforms. To establish myself, I had to “talk the talk” and “walk the walk” (De Walt/De Walt 2002) and in a way prove myself to be knowledgeable about Jamaica in order to be accepted as a visitor and interviewer of the local scene. Attending the *Carifesta* as well as the *Jamaica Day* concerts in Montreal was another great way of entering the field. However, not only outside activities, events and the staging of Jamaican culture, but also contacts conducted through social media created critical entry points into the local spaces of the Jamaican community in Montreal. Here, Jamaican spaces, meeting points, or Jamaican-run events, apart from the public festivals and concerts, are rather exclusive, meaning that there are not many white people present. Even though a solid basis of contacts and frequent access to the field emerged through my attendance of events or online contacts, many people were suspicious about my sudden appearance. It took some time, endurance, and positivity to convince people to take part in this study. Hence, there was no formal means of agreement for participation, rather an organic growing of relationships that entailed a personal presence on my part at important places, events or meeting points.

After gaining a first set of contacts, I used a snowball sampling method to reach out to more and more people over time. During this process, I realized that there was a wide range of individuals from the working class to upper-middle class, some with tertiary level education as well as domestic and farm workers and some professionals and creatives from various disciplines. The access to male spaces and male life worlds had its limitations for me, both as a woman and an outsider. Realizing that the access to male respondents was proving to be difficult, I decided to pursue a woman-centred research. Initially, this focus was not my intention; however, from the beginning of the research phase, I faced major difficulties in approaching men as a female researcher. Unexpectedly, it was extremely hard to get into contact with men in semi-public social spaces without experiencing flirting or being ensnared in the androcentric-dominated Jamaican music scene. Here, gender played a crucial role in the course of my fieldwork since being a female researcher determined my path and whereabouts in Montreal. In chapter six, I explain precisely

how the field access worked and why I finally focussed on female life worlds and experiences.

In the summer of 2016, I had luckily already met two of my interlocutors Elisha and Ms. Brown, which made it easier to obtain more research participants in the second phase. Until December 2016, I carried out interviews in Montreal with 20 participants, of which 14 were narrative, in-depth interviews (Weis 1994) with Jamaican women to learn more about their personal lives and local experiences. Weis explains,

“Interviewing can inform us about the nature of social life. [...] We can learn also, through interviewing about people`s interior experiences. [...] We can learn the meanings to them of their relationships, their families their work, and their selves. We can learn about all the experiences, from joy through grief, that together constitute the human condition” (1994: 1).

Most interviews were longer than two hours. The interviews also entailed biographical depictions (Schütze 1983) that reconstruct life histories, which together with the participant observation and daily life activities, were crucial components of this study. Participant observation consisted of densely observing (Spittler 2001) and accompanying the women as they went about their daily activities at work, at church, at the salon, at quiz and bingo nights, at fashion and musical events or simply in their leisure time in the sense of a “deep hanging out” (Ingold 2007). Over time, a liberation from the pressure to act or engage (Reichert 1999: 57) and an openness for “serendipity” (Hazan/Hertzog 2016) to occur and to just be there allowed me to grasp a sense of my interlocutors’ daily lives in the city of Montreal and also their individual connections to Jamaica. Using participant observation (Malinowski 1922; 1935) was hence a tentative approach of distance and closeness, retreating from or participating in daily activities whenever feasible or possible for the interlocutors. However, this does not mean that the emic (insider’s) and etic (outsider’s) views were mutually exclusive; instead they complemented each other by giving both subjective and objective interpretations to the “thick descriptions” (Geertz 2003). Here, journaling (with a fieldwork diary) and collecting of my own thoughts throughout the research were essential techniques to follow up with a theory that evolved from the research material gathered in the sense of “grounded theory” (Glaser/Strauss 1967; Glaser 1999). Additionally, informal conversations at the kitchen table (Schlehe 2008) informed and enriched this study tremendously. Especially, eating at Ms. Brown’s house became an important routine, where many “rich points” (Agar 2008) occurred, as the communal consumption of traditional Jamaican meals opened a window to the underlying socio-cultural subtext of values, traditions, childhood memories and intergenerational narratives. Daily conversations and in-depth biographical interviews were hence the ideal way to discover more about an individual’s experiences.

One of these interviews led me to Carol as another vital source of information. Hence, I travelled from Montreal to Toronto to meet with her for an interview. Two days later, I met Ms. Brown who also came from Montreal to the Toronto Pearson airport to fly to Jamaica and followed her on her travels. As fieldwork evolved, it became more and more relevant to follow four of the five interlocutors on their travels to Jamaica. I spent over six months in Jamaica in several fieldwork periods. Since none of my respondents lived a stationary life, it became necessary to conduct the ethnography in a way that respected their individual life circumstances. The study thus aimed at a “follow the people” concept (Marcus 1995: 90f.) and strived for a holistic picture that drew its information from as many different angles as possible. However, I tried not to interrupt the daily activities of the research partners through my presence. This undertaking was a challenge, especially while I was present in relatively exclusive female spaces in Montreal or during the travels to Jamaica, where I undoubtedly influenced the places and spaces I entered and the people with whom I interacted.

My previous fieldwork in Jamaica for my Master’s thesis on Reggae music led me to stay on the island for almost five years, therefore, former research and work contacts in Jamaica greatly helped approaching and acquiring local interlocutors. Because of this fact, a critical self-reflection on my part, mainly concerning personal contact, was essential. In Jamaica, the fieldwork consisted of following my respondents on their return or holiday trips to the island. Here, I engaged whenever possible in their daily activities and conducted interviews whenever this seemed feasible. I also met with interlocutors who had already returned to Jamaica some years prior. As an additional method, life course analysis (Rubinstein 1990) gained more and more importance towards the end of my fieldwork. While being attentive to socio-culturally effective structural (external) influences, it seemed to be a crucial method of understanding women’s decision-making processes and defining them as wholly embodied and complex beings with agency over their lives. The combination of life course and interview analysis provided important biographical clues that highlight not only age-related patterns in conjunction with historically grown socio-cultural structures in Jamaica, but moreover commonalities amongst all the women of this study. While different in age and social background, they share certain similar migratory experiences.

The methodology and my inductive approach are mirrored in the written elaboration of my ethnography, which passes through various spaces, places, levels, and encounters that reflect how I entered the field and how I was able to look behind individual curtains, while other parts remained hidden. For example, sitting in front of the beauty salon of Elisha’s sister Debby offered a totally different view (inside vs. outside) of the place, not only as an important space of female gathering, but moreover as a significant Jamaican hotspot in the city of Montreal invisible to the host society. Simply observing from outside how many different clients, work-

ers, delivery people, friends, family, musicians and local traders passed through the salon in the course of a regular working day revealed the salon to be a vital community institution. The reflection processes also included rather lonely days of journaling, which, especially in the harsh winter days in Montreal and Toronto, were a personal challenge for me. Spending parts of the winter in Canada made me realize how difficult it must be for people used to a tropical climate surrounded by the Caribbean Sea to live in an environment that resembles a freezer. As Ms. Brown said: “Every single bone cracks when you step inna [in] di [the] ice [snow], it cyan [cannot] be good”.

The prevalent themes of Jamaican women that often extend over a lifetime will become visible in the ethnography and, in conjunction with my theoretical approaches, will create a more complex and deeper portrait of their life worlds in Montreal. Concerning the overall selection process, I narrowed down the focus to the women I had the strongest personal contact with and who I understand as cultural brokers and translators of this ethnography. The study acknowledges that autobiographical narration is a process of defining experiences that are selective, overlapping, and evaluating. The problems of biographical reconstruction are well known in the literature (e.g. Fischer/Goblirsch 2006; Gardener 2001) and methodologically only partially resolvable. Knowledge and related worlds of imagination are subject to a dynamic process that puts life experiences into perspective. Narratives reflect actions, considerations, and popularize certain forms and acts of knowing. Migration, therefore, is a formative, dynamic learning process (Treiber 2013), where temporal and spatial transformations of knowledge and imaginaries build the foundation of making individual, formerly perplexing or incomprehensible actions in the host and home societies, coherent.

