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Transcultural Ethnography in Tandems: Collaboration and Reciprocity Combined and Extended

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Introduction

Following four decades of critical reflection on the issues of power and the politics of representation in the social sciences, a renewed interest for knowledge divides has recently emerged. The World Social Science Report (International Social Science Council 2010) revealed many of the inequalities and asymmetries that have shaped the production of scientific knowledge and the reproduction of the disciplines. Accused of academic and methodological imperialism, due to the fact that most methodological knowledge has been developed in the context of Western universities and has often been used for Western research in non-Western contexts, the North has become the subject of much criticism (Ryen 2011: 439). Indeed, it must be conceded that despite the fact that contemporary postcolonial approaches are strong in respect to theory, relatively few efforts have been undertaken to decolonize the social science methodologies in order to work out approaches based on equality and exchange. In this paper we want to present and discuss our experiences in developing such an approach.¹

Focusing on the discipline of anthropology, the objective of this paper is to introduce an innovative model of collaboration that strives to overcome categorical divisions such as ‘native’ or ‘foreign’ anthropologists and establishes fieldresearch methodology based on multirelational practice in dynamic, flexible constellations and open social fields. As an example a joint Indonesian-German project will be presented in the following. Since 2004 the Departments of Anthropology of the Albert-Ludwigs-University (ALU) in Freiburg, Germany (*Institut für Ethnologie*), and Gadjah Mada University (UGM) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia (*Jurusan Antropologi*), have developed a common, student-centered program for fieldwork exercises and teaching that is based on cross-national, transcultural collaboration.² In this UGM-ALU program students learn to practice ethnography in tandems both in Asia and in Europe. Thus, they collaborate in a reciprocal manner.

A crucial aspect of this project and model is that we want to put to use the multiple differences, positions and relations between cultures. We regard this as a contribution to a restructuring of the global project of anthropology as a debate among equals in a connected world with all its richness of differences and problems of inequalities. A reinvention of the „professional culture of method“, as George Marcus (2008: 5) formulates it, does not only refer to the level of literal technique and research tools (methods) but implies a reform of the *conditions* of research. Our project supposes that a reform of the setting of ethnographic fieldwork practice is a crucial aspect of a reinvention

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¹ This paper is mainly based on a presentation by Judith Schlehe at a BMBF-funded conference on „Methodology in Southeast Asian studies: grounding research – mixing methods“, Freiburg, 29-31 May, 2012.

² We are very grateful for the financial support by the foundation Mercator (Mercator Stiftung) (2004-2006) and the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) (from 2007 on, from 2010-13 in the program “Hochschuldialog mit der islamischen Welt”) and both universities, especially the Fakultas Ilmu Budaya (Faculty of Arts and Humanities) of the Gadjah Mada University.
on the meta-level of methodology.\(^3\) Epistemological as well as methodological issues and research practice are intertwined. What this project proposes is that transcultural collaboration is a key trope in this reinvention because it introduces multiperspectivity in flexible constellations.

For sure, we are not the first ones to advocate this, but, surprisingly, we could not bring to mind many concrete, practical efforts to achieve such a goal.\(^4\) We also do not know of any project similar to ours in respect to the combination of transcultural collaboration \textit{and} reciprocity. Conducting field research together both in Indonesia and in Germany is something new. Therefore, the UGM-ALU tandem project is exceptional, both in terms of its nature and its impact on the participants. There are tremendous effects on students who have participated in the program as well as on their ethnographies.

This article combines the viewpoints of two authors: Judith Schlehe is one of the inventors of the model and initiators of the program presented here and she has been supervising the project since 2004 together with her Indonesian colleagues. The second author, Sita Hidayah, is an insider as she has been a student participant in 2006. She joined the program again as a young lecturer in 2011 accompanying an Indonesian group to Freiburg, Germany.

She used this opportunity to conduct systematic research on the experiences of eight Indonesian-German student-pairs during their fieldwork exercises. They reflected and evaluated the project with her. This provided the basis for her “observing the observers” and for a reflective ethnography as proposed by Charlotte Aull Davies: “ethnographic research which embraces its intrinsic multi-layered reflexivity without turning inward to a complete self-absorption that undermines our capacity to explore other societies and cultures.” (Davies 1999: 25). In Hidayah’s case the exploration of “other” societies and cultures focused on teams of students similar to the ones of which she had been part of just a few years ago.

We will begin this article with a discussion of the ideas of the outsider and insider anthropologists. Next, we will present our reciprocal tandem model, which has also to be related to the different histories of Anthropology as a discipline in Europe and Indonesia. Experiences with the UGM-ALU program on a practical level as well as limitations will be discussed. This leads to further thoughts on epistemological issues. We will explicitly argue in favour of both the appreciation, employment \textit{and} overcoming of differences. What we mean and suggest is to overcome differences in their categorical, binary sense and work instead with transdifference, thereby altering and reinventing methodology and ethnographic research practice.

From a regional perspective we propose to open a much-needed dialogue on innovative constellations of collaboration across Southeast Asia. Our hope is that the ideas and experiences which are presented in the following can inspire other researchers to develop new constellations for conducting field research and work out alternative ways of social science knowledge production

\(^3\) Methodology refers to the principles and procedures of inquiry and formation of knowledge whereas methods are the practical tools and techniques.
in order to pluralize research pathways not only in Southeast Asian Studies but across areas and disciplines.

**Outsider/insider anthropology and intersecting differences**

The hegemonic origins and traditions of anthropology implied in former times that mainly white males conducted field research in the Global South, thereby constructing a distinctive cultural Other, often in an Orientalist way. In an effort to overcome this, since the 1970s there has been an increasing debate concerning the value of research in the culture and social milieu of the anthropologists themselves (Messerschmidt 1981; Jackson 1987). “Anthropology at home” – on familiar terrain – which is also referred to as insider, native, auto- or indigenous ethnography refers not only to anthropologists from Africa, Asia or Latin America who undertake field research in their home countries, but also to Euro-Americans who investigate their home societies (Alvarado Leyton 2009). In the lengthy discussions concerning the advantages and disadvantages of the insider/outsider position for the research outcomes, it is possible to identify several key arguments:

An “outsider” or “foreign” or “visiting anthropologist” is said to be more aware of taken-for-granted aspects of culture, less involved in internal power struggles, hierarchies and dependencies, less obliged to expectations and sensibilities, less caught in gender roles, religious affiliations or involved in gossip. Therefore he/she should be able to ask critical questions and explore sensitive issues and should be more likely to recognize differences through encounters with the Other, and through his/her positioning during fieldwork. On the other hand, an “insider anthropologist” (a local scholar) allegedly has easier access to the field, more inclination for immersion, no language problems as well as knowledge of the local communication models and narrative formats, a better understanding of non-verbal cues and a better intuitive understanding, more contextual knowledge, more motivation to challenge dominant perspectives, and subsequently to produce counter-hegemonic, liberating knowledge relevant to the studied communities.

Some advocates of a superiority of Indigenous Anthropology claim that decolonized, self-determined indigenous methodologies would therefore employ indigenous perspectives as well as indigenous conceptual and analytical frames, by using techniques and methods drawn from their respective traditions. Such research, for instance the „research by Maori, for Maori with the help of invited others“ (Maaka, quoted in Bishop 2005: 113; cf. also Denzin/Lincoln/Tuhiwai Smith 2008), could henceforth constitute a legitimate Indigenous Anthropology. In a similar vein, Syed Farid Alatas proposes an alternative, decolonized Asiacentric discourse within the social sciences.

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4 One example would be the volume edited by Kaltmeier and Berkin (2012).
5 This debate does not only hold true for Anthropology but for area studies and social science in general. Concerning Southeast Asia, Heryanto asks provocatively “Can There Be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies?” (Heryanto 2007).
6 In the mid-1980s, anthropological studies of Europe were recognized as a sub-field of the discipline (Mori 2013: 3).
Based on indigenous historical experience and knowledge as well as conceptual pluralism, such a discourse thereby is claimed to overcome Orientalism, Eurocentrism and academic imperialism in what ultimately is said to lead to an autonomous social science (Alatas 2006).

We (the authors of this chapter) see in these approaches a tendency to essentialize, romanticize and idealize local knowledge and “the indigenous”. Alatas himself identifies auto-orientalism as a problem in Asian social science/anthropology.7 Mona Abaza and Georg Stauth remark: “Those…who claim authenticity by ‘indigenisation’ might not yet be aware of the fact that the local knowledge, upon which they want to construct an alternative, has long since been part of global structures, or of the fact that they play a part in a global cultural game which itself calls for the ‘essentialisation’ of local truth.” (Abaza/Stauth 1990: 211).

Apart from this tendency, obviously the insider-outsider distinction is not a clear and easy one. Many non-Western, Southern anthropologists conduct studies “at home”, in which they focus on „the other at home“ (Boskovic/Hylland Eriksen 2008: 14). Not all of them show empathy or respect towards these “others”. Sometimes Southeast Asian anthropologists reproduce ambivalent attitudes in the context of certain post-colonial national cultural and ethnic politics, which on the one hand affirm folklorized and exoticized “minority cultures”, while they, on the other hand, also strive to “develop” and “integrate” them. But even a member of such a minority – clearly not a homogenous entity – would not have the intrinsic authority or privilege to access indigenous knowledge (Kratoska/Raben/Schulte Nordholt 2005: 12). To avoid essentialization in categorizing someone as a native/an indigenous/an insider anthropologist, multiple affiliations and many more intersecting structural factors should be considered besides nationality and place-based experiences: race, ethnicity (including interethnic people with dual or multiple backgrounds and belonging), gender, class and the socio-economic sphere, religion, sub-culture, age, academic training,8 and specific factors which have to be identified for each topic and context. Thus, the peculiar positionalities of all involved subjects – the subject positions9 – as well as the macro-structural issues of inequalities and the related (geo)politics of knowledge are crucial for all research encounters. This is what methodological reflexivity demands us to consider.

But having said that there is a multiplicity of interconnected factors which must be considered does not mean that each of them is of less importance. To the contrary, differences do always matter. They shape the horizons of our perceptions, conceptualizations and methodologies. By remaining sensitive to the politics of positional differences, an approach as suggested here, and will be further explicated below, acknowledges and respects cultural differences without naturalizing.

7 Furthermore, in contrast to the above mentioned view that local scholars would more often produce counter-hegemonic, liberating knowledge relevant to the studied communities, Alatas points critically to the fact that the research practice of “insiders” in Southeast Asia is often policy-oriented and in line with the objectives of the state (Alatas 2005: 236).
8 Many researchers from the Global South gained their training within Western academic institutions and within disciplinary methodologies.
freezing or fixing them. Being an insider or outsider anthropologist – or “partially insider” respectively “outsider within” (Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 5) – is relative and relational as it depends on the criteria of identification and belonging, on relationships and on research topics and interests. It can change in the course of time or from one moment to the next. The crucial challenge and opportunity of anthropology is to make use of gradual differences and similarities, mutual curiosity and empathy, intellectual insights and knowledge through the body, as well as all kinds of relationships and relatedness. It would be an immense loss if anthropologists would – as a reaction to the criticism about practices and ideologies of Othering – only conduct research in their respective “homes” without genuine interest in other worlds. Instead, we (Westerners, non-Westerners and everybody in between alike) should maximize our exposure to other visions. It opens up new possibilities if we think of manifold cultural practices as sources of methodological innovation. And anthropologists from whatever origin should be enabled to do research on, in and with all cultures in the world (cf. also Nyamnjoh 2012). Therefore, at present most scholars would agree with an approach as promoted for example by Beng-Lan Goh (2011) who proposes to de-center and diversify knowledge production.

As a form of productive diversification in anthropology, our tandem program makes insider and outsider perspectives complement one another in an attempt to transcend the dichotomy of Eurocentric and Asiacentric views in a synergetic search for diversity and conversation across cultures. Or, to say it in Aihwa Ong’s words: “we should develop cross-cultural capacities for ... translating across diverting ethical regimes.” (Ong 2009: 92).

The starting point of the UGM-ALU program presented here was as follows: Why not bring the views and perspectives of differently positioned researchers practically together? Collaboration should not only take place between like-minded people, who share the objective of consensus-making. On the contrary, as Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing has observed, “the most culturally productive kinds of collaboration […] is collaboration with a difference: collaboration with friction at its heart.” (Tsing 2005: 246). Difference is the basis for complementarity. And collaboration should be more than a mere comparison of data gathered by solitary researchers in their respective field sites. Therefore, quite simply, our basic idea is to overcome the “loneliness” of the solitary fieldworker (Gottlieb 1995) and the connected celebration of individual achievement. We bring perspectives from intersecting differences together in empirical research practice and with the objective of transformative learning. A crucial aspect therefore is to

9 The notion of positionality in anthropology is connected with reflexivity and refers to the awareness of the situatedness of knowledge. Crucial factors are social relations, intersecting structural categories (gender, race, class, nationality) and subjectivities which influence the research process and results.
10 This is also not far from what Yamashita (2006) designates as “interactive Anthropology in a world anthropologies project”.
11 Such procedures characterize even the most recent and sophisticated approaches in anthropology. For instance the “anthropology of the contemporary” (Rabinow 2008) - mainly focusing on emergent knowledge formations in biopolitics and the life sciences - explicitly stresses collaboration between researchers. But this collaboration takes place among male scholars from Euro-American background who had gathered their data in laboratories and from texts and who discuss concepts and data evaluation afterwards.
overcome the subject - (research) object division by means of reciprocity, mutuality, role reversal and manifold, ever-changing constellations.

**Collaborative and reciprocal transcultural research in anthropological fieldwork training**

The fundamental structure of our model of research which allows the constant realization of multiperspectivity is the set-up of tandem research partners. In 2004, a group of German ALU-students went to Yogyakarta to conduct anthropological field research together with their partners from UGM. Tandem pairs consisting of one German and one Indonesian student of Anthropology were created, and they did research together for six weeks, each pair on its own peculiar topic. A principle taken for granted by Schlehe has been identified as an interesting feature of the project by Hidayah: Gender, religion, class or other identity markers are of minor importance to the initial constitution of the partnership. It is built first of all on shared research interests and a different university affiliation.

Under the joint supervision of German and Indonesian lecturers the arising difficulties as well as the chances for synthesizing the respective perspectives were constantly reflected upon. This did not exclusively take place within the tandems or with the supervisors but also during regular workshops in which all participants were engaged and came to understand the project as a collective pursuit and team effort. Thus, we did in a first step what Wesley-Smith and Goss (2010: xvii) designate as “to bring area studies to the areas studied” in interactive international learning communities.

Because partners from two countries conduct joint fieldwork as equals, this constellation allows the researchers to have two, if not more, points of view in exploring shared ethnographic interests. In this way we attempt to create new combinations and forms of mutual accommodation, debate and critical dialogue that make use of various and different perspectives. *The goal of the collaboration is not consensus-making, but rather to provide the basis for productive conversation, shared cosmopolitan debate and dialogue and enhanced self-reflexivity.*

But, the most innovative – and therefore, we would claim, most important – part of this program is that in the following year (2005) the Indonesian students were invited to Freiburg to engage in fieldwork on selected aspects of German culture. The topics were similar to the ones in Indonesia in the year before. The guests did this with the help of their former tandem partners, who were also

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12 In the following years the students from Freiburg University were not necessarily Germans. For instance, in 2006, the Freiburg-group travelling to Yogyakarta also included a Turkish guest student and a Swiss student from Freiburg’s partner University of Basel.

13 Thorough anthropological field research should be much longer (ideally for at least one year), but due to financial and time restrictions our fieldwork exercises can not be extended.
joined by the next “generation” of German students preparing to do research in Indonesia in 2006.\textsuperscript{14}

From then on the anthropology departments of the Gadjah Mada University and the University of Freiburg have organized such tandem-research fieldwork training and practice annually, alternately in Indonesia and Germany, supervised by lecturers from both universities. Before we say more about the principles and procedures of this project it may be useful to reflect briefly on the historically embedded distinction between the national traditions of anthropology on and in Indonesia compared to Germany. This will help to understand that the novelty of experiences is not identical for the research partners.

\textbf{The historical backgrounds of Indonesian and German anthropologists}

Indonesian studies emerged in the 19th century (Koentjaraningrat 1987). Historically speaking, the nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropology of Indonesia was heavily influenced by Dutch scholars. As observed by Platenkamp and Prager on a sampling of contributions in \textit{Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde}, the most famous anthropological periodical in the Netherlands, there were significant paradigm shifts in terms of the scientific framework and perspective of Dutch scholars in studying the East and West Indies’ populations and cultures. The first period beginning in 1853 saw all contributors focused on assessing differences of the colonies from their own culture. The second period started in 1885, marked by the establishment of \textit{Volkenkunde} as a discipline, where Dutch scholars framed different societies in the Indonesian archipelago with general ethnological theories claiming to be applicable to all social phenomena all over the world. And by 1925, due to the influence of modern sociology, the idea prevailed “that an original coherence of collective representations constituted the overall frame of comparisons of societies.” (Platenkamp and Prager 1994: 725).

Indonesian anthropology – in the sense of anthropology practiced by Indonesian scholars – sets a different, single trajectory. After Koentjaraningrat laid the first foundation of Indonesian anthropology, anthropological training in Indonesia has mainly been inward-looking and introspective.\textsuperscript{15} Indonesian anthropologists have hardly ever conducted comparative empirical research on societies outside the Indonesian archipelago. They have not \textit{experienced} differences, similarities or transculturality by comparing different cultures but have only investigated Indonesian societies.

The anthropology of Indonesia continues to be a field dominated by foreign scholars. Anthony Reid observes that ninety percent of the studies about Indonesia are written by scholars who are

\textsuperscript{14} The results of the fieldwork in Germany (\textit{Budaya Barat dalam Kacamata Timur} / Western Culture in Eastern Perspective) have been published in book form in the Indonesian language to ensure that the findings can be widely read and distributed in the country (Schlehe/Kutanegara 2006).
not living in Indonesia. In his view, Indonesians are the most ineffective people in telling their own stories (Reid 2011). Indeed, Indonesia shows a dependency on global social science knowledge and there is very little global absorption of its locally produced knowledge (Evers and Gerke 2003).

Because Indonesian social scientists have barely ever conducted research on cultures or communities outside Indonesian territory, it is a new experience for the Indonesian students of anthropology involved in the program presented here that they do fieldwork – together with their German colleagues – on Indonesian and German culture.

For the German students the historical background is just the opposite. As outlined above, anthropology, as it was practiced in Europe, implied from the beginning on until recently to study cultural Others. Only lately there has been strong criticism against categorical divisions between Self and Other and between the related division of disciplines (sociology for Euro-American societies, European anthropology for European folklore or local heritage and anthropology for the others). Contemporary anthropology is increasingly seen as a discipline which studies socio-cultural and transcultural processes across all regions and worldwide.

Thus, our project is in accordance with this new trend. Nevertheless, against the background of the Western ‘outward looking’ tradition of the discipline, studying their own society is a relatively new experience for the German anthropologists in our program, whereas, regarding the historical background of Indonesian anthropology, studying another culture and society is new for the Indonesians.

Albeit these novelties for both sides, it has to be conceded that doing ethnography in Germany is the more innovative part of this program. The tandems are pioneers in many respects and they have to explain their intentions and research context to their interlocuters at length. Fortunately, with very few exceptions, they were well received so far. Many Germans liked the idea of a ‘reversed gaze’ and of a collaboration between German and Indonesian students. Yet, the designation as ‘reversed’ shows once more that for a long time it has been seen as ‘normal’ that Western anthropologists studied Indonesia.

The selection of research topics in the UGM-ALU program

The project strives to transcend both the conventional approach of ethnography and the established classification of the world into totalising polarities of non-West and West. We choose research topics that are not focusing on cultural alterity but on knowledge exchange between fieldworkers

15 Eric Thompson remarks that Koentjaraningrat encouraged a number of students to undertake studies outside of Indonesia (in Thailand and Malaysia). Nevertheless he also refers to the strong “inward looking” post-colonial, national tradition in Indonesian anthropology (Thompson 2012: 673).
and field interlocuters (Elie 2012: 1215) and on topics in which all of us are involved and included.

Already in the course of the first encounters in 2004 and 2005, both sides (the Indonesians and the Germans) became conscious of the manifold differences between their respective research efforts. These differences were of course not entirely unexpected due to the differing backgrounds. But they came as a surprise in regard to the academic context. Formal and informal arrangements in university life, institutional structures, communication patterns, social hierarchies, rituals, teaching styles, learning habits, levels and types of knowledge, preferred research methods, ways to spend leisure time, international affiliations, the impact of religion – in short: the academic culture – differed and impacted more strongly the construction of academic knowledge and concrete cooperation than had initially been anticipated. Not only the methods and theories differed, but the epistemologies and contextualization of acquired knowledge were subject to differing interpretations as well. It became increasingly sensible how much learning, teaching, and the production of knowledge are embedded in particular social and political contexts as well as in specific institutional cultures.

In the supervisors’ view, these differences have to be perceived, acknowledged and integrated into a productive collaboration. Therefore, it was decided that in 2006 and 2007 the “umbrella” topic for all tandem pairs would be “academic cultures” – the inspection of universities as crucial institutions for higher education and learning. Accordingly, each group would focus on specific sub-topics. Thus, an even more unusual approach to anthropology was developed: A joint reciprocal and self-reflective research into our very own cultural settings, universities and academic cultures. The ethnographers were the ones conducting the research as well as the ones being researched. This added to the already complex subject-object positions and it suggested yet another layer of the tandem project. A book was published on the findings in both languages of research, Indonesian and English (Schlehe/Simatupang 2008).

In the past years the program then was continued with research on many more issues which were characterized by possibilities of inserting ourselves into the epistemology. We saw ourselves as part of the researched field when topics were studied like “Applying Academic Knowledge”, “The Popularization of Traditions”, “Religion and Politics” and “Perceptions of Globalization”. Globalization, for instance, is usually considered as an international process, whereas this project focused on the local dynamics which constitute and mediate global flows. As we (the participants

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16 Only Parsudi Suparlan conducted his research about the overseas Javanese community in Suriname 42 years ago. The book *The Javanese in Suriname Ethnicity in an Ethnically Plural Society* was published in 1995 and has never been published for an Indonesian audience. Several studies about Indonesian migrants abroad followed this trend, but none broke away from the tendency to study fellow Indonesians.

17 We do not have the capacity to publish the results of each generation but the students often use their empirical results for their final thesis and for articles and we tried out other forms of presentation like exhibitions both in Freiburg and in Yogyakarta which focus more on visual documentation. We have also received some attention from the media (Jakarta Post, Spiegel Online).
from both universities) are ourselves subject to such processes, it is an appropriate topic to explore in the local contexts of Indonesia (in 2012) and Germany (in 2013).

In the UGM-ALU program, languages used are Indonesian and English in Indonesia, and English in Germany. This is due to the fact that the participating Germans get the chance to learn Indonesian for a year before they depart whereas the Indonesian students, for a lack of opportunities and funding, learn German only very briefly. Therefore the research topics in Germany are situated in social contexts where we can expect English language proficiency. Apart from that, for ethical reasons, it is also made sure that we do not touch any sensitive topics or work with vulnerable social groups.

**Extended reciprocity: transdifference understood as complementary to intersecting differences**

Our model for the UGM-ALU program is based on reciprocity in the sense that the research is conducted both in Indonesia and in Germany, and the researcher who for one year has been the native anthropologist (the host), subsequently becomes the visiting, foreign anthropologist (the guest) in the following year. In both cases the perspectives of native and foreign researcher are juxtaposed and combined. This double experience and role reversal revealed valuable insights concerning the positionality and interpretation of culture. For instance in respect to the access to the field, we learned that the fact that in Indonesia the foreigner is more welcome than the native is not necessarily reminiscent of colonialism because, surprisingly, we made the same observation in Freiburg too. So, now we interpret it as ‘exoticism’ of both Indonesians and Germans who just find it more appealing to talk to a foreigner. It also proved that the questions asked by the outsiders – which the locals often initially found not that interesting – in many cases turned out to be inspiring for both sides. In this respect, differences were enriching. This is appreciated – nevertheless we wish to extend this classical notion of reciprocity in the simple sense of German-Indonesian (or European-Southeast Asian) exchange. We also want to go beyond the notion of intersecting differences as characterized by several interconnected stable factors which are seen as responsible for clear differences and excluding categories. Of equal importance is the experience that most research topics in the globalized world include and involve all of us. Within the umbrella topics for each generation, the students frequently chose issues that had to do with inter- and transculturality. This meant that the local partner was not necessarily attached any more closely to the topic than his/her foreign counterpart. This became obvious when a German-Indonesian tandem pair explored the gender concepts in the punk and hardcore scene in Yogyakarta. The German student was a punk himself, the Indonesian was not (cf. Schlehe 2006). Or, as in the context of research on “religion and politics” in Freiburg, the Indonesian student felt closer to the Muslims in Freiburg than his German partner did. Or, to give an other example, the coincidental
constellation which occurred, when a tandem researched ‘New Hinduism’ in Freiburg: if the German partner would not have been a Hindu herself, both partners would have been foreigners in this context. Hence, exploring each topic in shifting positions, while experimenting and critically reflecting on ‘transdifferences’ beyond the binary constructions of stable opposition (Lösch 2005), turned out to be scientifically rewarding – and enjoyable. The concept of transdifference is based on the assumption that the construction of difference is indispensable for human construction of order, but strives to destabilize and overcome both the reductiveness of binary thinking and the fixation of differences in images of cultural opposition, separation and closure. According to Breinig and Lösch (2002: 22), transdifference is an “umbrella concept that allows us to inspect phenomena that do not neatly fit models of clear-cut difference”. It “refers to moments in which difference becomes temporarily unstable” (ibid.: 28). Breinig and Lösch see transdifference as complementary to, and not just ‘beyond’ difference. In our view, this is the most appropriate concept for what this project is doing: initiating reciprocal collaborative research relations which are based on intersecting differences and at the same time overcome them by letting the participants experience oscillating forms of transdifference.

Moreover, as mentioned above, reciprocity did not simply involve field research in each others broader cultural context, it also reached out to our allegedly common, “own” ground; the academic cultures. Last but not least, there were several initiatives to research our project itself. These studies focussed on the perceptions, practices and experiences of working in transcultural tandems. Therefore the subjects and “objects” of research (the “we” and “them”) were constantly and systematically reversed, repositioned and seamlessly experienced and interpreted from new viewpoints. Thus, on the basis of this model, we now propose an anthropologizing of both Indonesian and German culture, of academic culture, of transcultural projects and of us anthropologists (cf. Halstead et al. 2008: 10). In this vein, we go far beyond the approach of “collaborative ethnography”, as proposed by Lassiter (2005; 2008). He thinks of collaboration within the classical “studying down” constellation in which, according to him, research and writing should be organized “alongside natives”, in true conversation between outside anthropologists and their collaborators. These collaborators are imagined as being structurally subaltern (in hierarchically lower positions). The researcher in Lassiter’s view, should, as a committed outsider, undertake efforts to establish a dialogue. In contrast to this, we suggest in our model that all participants who interact across boundaries form an integral part of the topics under investigation. Principally, everyone assumes both the roles of researcher and researched and there

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18 Topics were e.g. foreign artists living in Indonesia, European-Indonesian mixed couples, the Indonesian punk/hardcore scene, the experiences of alumni from universities abroad.
19 In a similar sense Henrietta Moore explores conceptualizations of others and otherness that are “not overdetermined by figures of difference” (Moore 2011: 9).
20 Apart from Hidayah’s study presented here, researching the researchers constituted a sub-topic of a tandem-pair and became topic of a Magister thesis (for a short summary see Weikhard in Schlehe 2006). We found that more productive than the usual formalized evaluations which were done as well. This form of “researching the researchers” could be ideally also negotiated with project funding agencies as a key component of project evaluation.
is no dualism between pre-existing “data” and subjective interpretation. In this way of studying down, horizontally, upwards – and always including ourselves – we all become the co-producers of knowledge.

**Methods reinvented in practice**

The main tools for conducting field research have been invented in the West. Reading introductory books on methods in Anthropology creates the impression that there are standardized methods (like participant observation, several types of interviews etc.) which are applicable wherever one conducts research. Although, every anthropologist knows from experience that one has to be very open, sensitive, flexible and creative in order to constantly reinvent the tools by adapting them to the peculiar circumstances, people and relationships in each field. Anthropological fieldwork is a relational process (Spencer 2010) which has to be grounded in each particular field. An anthropologist has to learn the cultural ways and conventions of communication and he or she should become able to accommodate to ever changing contexts. For instance, when a visiting anthropologist does fieldwork in Indonesia he or she will realize that the conventional face-to-face in-depth interview where two people make an appointment to sit together and talk in an intimate way is not necessarily the form of conversation with which the interlocuters feel most comfortable. A group conversation that happens between people who just drop by might be much more appropriate. Although then the social hierarchies have to be considered because what interlocuters say may rather reflect their position than their opinion. An anthropologist who has learned to understand these social patterns will appreciate this as important data on the social context of a phenomenon. What the researchers from the German side in our program learned is, furthermore, that the ways of asking questions in Indonesia should be adapted to a style which is not perceived as investigative by the interlocutors but rather a bit casual. Taking pictures and recording is not very problematic and many people are open in talking about their private lives and families whereas they are usually more careful in answering questions regarding politics.

On the other hand, the visiting anthropologists from UGM doing fieldwork in Germany have to get used to arrangements and appointments that optimize time and they are expected to ask direct questions that prove professional attention, deep interest and thorough reflection. Their impression is that in Freiburg people would engage more in questions related to politics and policy whereas what is considered as “private” is more difficult to access. People seem to be less available to share their personal lives. Recording devices and taking pictures are less welcome whereas taking notes is appreciated as a sign of meticulous scientific activity.

When students from different backgrounds conduct their fieldwork exercises together similarities and differences are experienced first-hand. They can learn from each other, discuss their styles and either strive for compromises and approximation or they can make conscious use of their different positions. In the latter case they will accept the differences in style. The local anthropologist trusts
then that their interlocutors too allow an outsider to do things (like asking questions) differently. This can also hold true for the definitions of research problems and for the data analysis. The relative insider will often profit from the outsider’s surprising perspective whereas the relative outsider may get valuable context information from a research partner who is closer involved in the investigated culture or sub-culture.

Nonetheless, the question remains to be asked: Have the students in this program been innovative in respect to a hybridization of their methods? There can be no general answer to this, because the pairs and teams did their fieldwork together and discussed, juxtaposed, merged and multiplied procedures, impressions and interpretations on the spot. It would be contradictory to extract fixed contrasts or generalizable guidelines for joint research practice from their reports.

Challenges, limitations and further learning

It should be kept in mind that the UGM-Freiburg project is just a training program with very limited time in the field. Four to six weeks is a far too short period for thorough anthropological field research. Furthermore, the students do not get the chance to evaluate their data together and they have to write their reports separately. The focus of the program is indeed more on the process of joint fieldwork and on methodological reflection rather than on the results.

Additionally, language poses problems and creates inequalities. Whereas the Germans learn Bahasa Indonesia for a year prior to their stay there (but are still far from being fluent), the Indonesians do not have this chance. Therefore they conduct field research in Germany in English. Not only in respect to language training but also in regard to prior experience there are considerable inequalities between the students. Most of the Germans have been travelling abroad before, whereas for the majority of the Indonesians the trip to Freiburg becomes their first overseas experience. Additionally, the ALU students are well equipped with ethnographic literature on Indonesia and Java that they had to read in preparatory courses whereas at UGM only in response to our program a course on “Etnografi Eropa” (Ethnography of Europe) was established. But this course can give them merely limited background knowledge on German culture. Most of what they know in advance about Freiburg and Germany comes from their seniors (the alumni of the program). These inequalities are an expression of the fact that our project is not a power-free zone and that we cannot completely overcome injustice. What has to be mentioned too, is that this has also an impact on the interpersonal relations and emotions of the partners. Most of the young Indonesians are more anxious and insecure when they arrive in Germany than most of the Germans are when they arrive in Yogyakarta. This led in several cases to a reproduction of the old stereotype making the European the more active and the Asian the more passive part. But it is

21 For sharp criticism of unequal so-called academic cooperations between Euro-American and Indonesian universities see Hauser-Schäublin (2010).
22 For the role of emotions in the field see Spencer (2010).
of utmost importance to stress that in nine years of running this program it became more and more obvious that neither the above mentioned inequalities nor race, culture, ethnicity, gender or religion are the most decisive factors for the dynamics of the collaborations in the tandems or teams in our program – but the individual personalities.

Reflecting stereotypes on ‘passive/active’ it is worth mentioning that the German students tend to complain about passivity of their tandem partners when they are in Yogya. They are quick in analyzing this as a cultural specificity. Only when in the following year the Indonesians are in Freiburg, the German partners realize that now they are the ones who are less active. But this time they do not explain this with culture – it is now seen as structural difference: the incoming students have much more time for doing research whereas the local ones are caught up in many obligations. This can be seen as an example for the learning experiences in this program.

From training to professionalization

The tandem-model of the UGM-Freiburg program was also extended to the PhD level with a Mongolian-German (male-male), a Cameroonian-Swiss (male-female) and an Indonesian-German (female-female) project of PhD candidates who conducted research on closely related topics. A comparison between the students and the PhD tandems reveals mainly three points. Firstly, different from the students’ tandem project which is based on reciprocity, the PhD projects tended to focus on fieldwork in Africa or Asia (or on African migrants in Germany). This was either due to the principles of the funding organizations or to the structure of broader projects in which the tandems were integrated, or caused by the research interests and language abilities of the young researchers. Thus, the reciprocal practice of the student project is less – or not – fulfilled in the PhD projects. It will cost extra efforts in the future to overcome this limitation. Secondly, for the PhD tandem partners it proved to be better not to spend all the time in the field together. Instead, an alteration of periods of researching together at one place and periods of being on her/his own at another field site was most favourable. This prevents competition and fits better to the requirements of writing separate PhD thesis in the end. Nonetheless the partners profited a lot from their shared fieldwork periods, from their discussions and comparisons afterwards and from their insights into the impacts of the researchers’ subject positions (cf. Tazanu 2012). Thirdly, there are also striking similarities between the undergraduate and the PhD tandems: for instance, in both constellations the partners made the somewhat surprising experience that, in contrast to what we find in the literature, it is often easier for the foreigner to get access to the field. Field interlocutors and research participants both in Indonesia and in Germany obviously found it more interesting and exciting to talk to a foreign student. But then, of course, the performance differs: interlocutors tend to attempt to impress the foreigner, to represent the positive side of their countries and
cultures, whereas they are more critical or more demanding towards a partial insider. Only by comparing their data the two researchers became conscious of these differences and the impacts on their research focus and results.

Thus, we can conclude from a comparison between the tandems in an undergraduate program and the ones on PhD level that there is no single model for collaborative transcultural research practice which is applicable under all circumstances. But in any case understanding is enhanced when diverse voices are heared, more perspectives are negotiated and when positions shift and boundaries blur.

**Summarizing remarks: key features and prospects**

The multiple points of view – of the insider and outsider and many positions in between, simultaneously employed – pave a new way of seeing things. Not just seeing, and seeing more, but also seeing differently. The project challenges ethnographers to exchange positions while at the same time experiencing themselves both as participants of a culture and observers of ever-changing others. It has continued to give students of anthropology in both universities enormous opportunities to conduct comparative ethnographies in international settings as well as to provide catharsis for their personal transformation.

What kind of knowledge can be expected from this project? Besides anthropological knowledge on cultural dynamics, and apart from the cognitive and embodied experience of spending some time abroad, there are more aspects which shape epistemologies and knowledge production. At times the students are not primarily interested in research or in their peculiar topics, but in the cooperation as such. It is simply an exciting experience to work, and communicate with, tandem partners from far away in an attempt to relate to their culture. Interactions during the process of doing joint research between students from Indonesian and German universities, while asserting their (trans)differences, create a sense of comradeship of the anthropologists. The commonality, and in a way, a commonality of anthropologists, can be seen in the dynamics of knowledge exchange and communication during the tandem project.

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23 For instance, in the case of the Cameroonian migrant conducting fieldresearch in Cameroon, he was confronted with many complaints about difficulties of living in Cameroon and expectations for support. In the end, the quest for remittances became the focus of his research (cf. Tazanu 2012). Another case is the Indonesian-German pair where the Indonesian who, as a Catholic, is in a minority position in Indonesia, strives to avoid religious issues whereas her German partner who has graduated from Islamic studies focuses on non-radical Muslim voices.

24 The project is not only important for the participating students and lecturers, enhancing their research capacity and knowledge, but also for their academic and personal circles. For Indonesians this includes parents and siblings and even their neighbourhood. Parents have been promoting the project to their surroundings, discussions about Germany and Anthropology in general occur in their houses, schools, and even in community meetings.

25 Hidayah’s investigation revealed also considerable emotional anxiety among the Indonesian students who visited Germany for the first time and where insecure how to approach their partners.
At the same time an intellectual training and a methodological experiment, the project offers “people to people” trans-cultural relations. It needs to be mentioned that besides the everyday research work of the tandem partners and the regular workshops for the whole group, the Indonesian and German students also spend much time and have a lot of fun together and some of them become close friends. Thus, in the inter-subjective exchange, divides between collaborator, colleague, friend, consultant, researcher and researched become blurred and the knowledge produced is not only scholarly but can also be empowering and transformative on a personal and emotional level. Doing ethnography means here navigation of meanings and knowledge exchange between and across contexts as well as rapport with both field interlocutors and co-researchers whose subject positions might become interchangeable. Therefore we finally characterize our model of transcultural reciprocal collaboration as based on intersubjectivity and interactivity, relationality, multiperspectivity, (re)positionality, inclusivity and critical reflexivity. Or, to put it differently: when diverse voices are heard and more perspectives are negotiated, when we learn to make productive use of mutual irritations and develop reciprocal openness for the new, then understanding is enhanced, resulting in the shifting of positions and the blurring of boundaries. This also corresponds with Martin Fuchs’ interactional concept of translation and representation (Fuchs 2009: 26) based on reciprocal and collaborative sense-making and sense-conveying and on shared experiences of difference and otherness across contexts.

The project is a work in progress. Our ambition is to incorporate more PhD tandems in the program, as well as to integrate more Indonesian universities and to work in teams of three instead of tandems. Another goal is to extend the project in an interdisciplinary way. From 2012 on, students of Anthropology and Political Science, respectively International Relations, work together. The partners can, in a both playful and systematic manner, do research in transcultural global arenas on the interaction between methodologies and systems of knowledge. In this way of inserting ourselves into the epistomology we hope to contribute to the globalization of research and the further development of novel methodologies based on an ongoing debate among differently positioned equals. Collaborative and reciprocal transcultural ethnography entails many prospects to reconfigure epistemic relations and work towards new possibilities for the re-imagining and experiencing of self-other relations. In our connected world the negotiation of identity and alterity in a joint search for grounded methodology goes beyond Southeast Asia and Europe. When collaboration and reciprocity are combined and extended they encompass transdifference and entail multiperspectivity thereby opening exciting chances for new ways of scientific exploration and personal growth.
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