

INTERVIEWS WITH GERMAN ANTHROPOLOGISTS

Could you please describe the milieu and the family you were born into?

I was born in Riehen, next to Basel. My father was a salesman and at the time of the economic boom, he went into business for himself in the field of import and export. Among other things, his business included the trade with other countries from the south, as well as coffee and cocoa trade. Thus, I grew up in a quite commercial environment. I have two siblings. My mother stayed at home. My mother was always a part of this family environment which had always been very important for me. Even as a small child I was strongly connected to my family and it was important for me to be at home. In retrospect – seeing everything through rose-coloured glasses anyway – I had a really secure childhood. These origins are actually the reason as well that I returned to Switzerland today.

A second thing which might be important was the fact my father was involved in local politics. He had a leading part in the organization *‘Vereinigung Evangelischer Wähler’* (meaning ‘Organisation of protestant voters’), a confessional-orientated party being in the middle of the tensions between the left wing party and the liberal middle-class party. The third component might have been the connection to clubs as my father was a very sport man.

Something that was quite important as well – and which had a great impact on my first writings – was the matter of sex. It has always been obvious that there is a gender gap, as well in our family. The work at school had always been quite easy for me, but when it came to the question if I should go to the grammar school as well – just like my brother – my mother used to say that after school, I would work as a secretary in my father’s business anyway. After wards, I would marry and then this would be it. I did not really understand this back then, but I knew for sure that I would not play this game. After four years I had completed secondary school, but actually I was just bored all the time. Then, I went to Basel to the so called girls’ high school – it was not exactly like a grammar school. In her welcome speech, the head praised those interesting housewives who could keep up with the things their husbands were telling and who could iron his shirts at the same time. This was what the classes were like: ironing! We were learning how to clean a kitchen. It was a nightmare for me back then, but I was not able to speak it out loud.



Accordingly, this high school for girls was not made to prepare the girl an academic career?

No, it was rather about the mainstream: nurses, nursery school teachers and a bit of social commitment. It totally corresponded to the former idea of the female part in society. I cannot remember all the details, but as I had contacts to the Swiss television industry, I finally applied for a technical traineeship over there. Video recordings were completely new at that time. I was accepted and thus, I organized myself a room in Zürich. At that time, it was a very radical change for me. Everything else was just over – except for family. I went home every weekend, not because I had to, but because I wanted to. Initially, I found Zürich very exciting as I could travel around everywhere and I was simply always on the spot. I knew as well though that I will not do that for the rest of my life. At home I told my parents that I would not know exactly how things are going on. Finally, I got information about the possibilities to catch up on my *Abitur*¹, but they told me it would take me at least four years – in 1963, this was an almost unmanageable long period of time for me at that time.

During these times of insecurity, my parents told me to go to language classes and to learn type writing for now, as this would always be useful. I was teaching myself the latter and I am pretty glad about it, as this is one of those skills you could always need – no matter what your job might be. Moreover, I went to a school in Welschland in French speaking Switzerland. There, I had a room and I tried to finish as fast as possible. Additionally, I was very lucky my parents could send me to London for half a year. I had room somewhere since I went to school over there as well. London was a completely new world for me and I spent a lot of time in the theatre.

After I came back I began an apprenticeship as a reporter in Basel. Basically it was another traineeship but this time for a local newspaper. I really enjoyed it but there as well, I realized quite soon that I have actually no idea about the things that I was writing about. At some point I could not accept this superficial way of working anymore – knowing a little bit about everything but actually knowing nothing in depth. It is not possible. At that time, I read about an exchange program in India as well, an experiment about International Living. Since I had always enjoyed travelling, I really wanted to go there. Thus, together with six or seven other Swiss people I went from Marseille on a ship via the Suez Canal to India. This was a real event lasting for about three months. Within these three months, we spent one month together with a family in a place called Madya Pradesh. For the last month, we stayed with another family in another place, namely in Gujarat. In the meantime, we were free to travel or do whatever we wanted.

What exactly where you supposed to do there?

Nothing. We were just supposed to live with the family getting to know other ways of living. We were only among upper-class people. These families could afford accommodating guests from Europe and thus, we were sort of ‘passed around’. I was always interested in the history of the servants as well. Anyway, in this case, I met strong opposition. Once – at my request – they brought me to a village near Indore, which was the hometown of one of the servant’s. It was obvious that people arranged everything over there just for my visit. During my free month, I went in the Himalaya,

¹ Qualification for university entrance.

to Rishikesh, where the Ganges has its source in the mountains. That was amazing! I can still remember vividly the intense and fresh impressions. I came from 'little Switzerland' and now, I could experience something totally new. I spent about one week in a little ashram where people lead a Spartan life. I wanted to get to know all these things, understanding alternative ways of life and I really wanted to learn everything about meditation. There, I got to know the European community – I was shocked! Basically, people were just asking me for cheese and bacon. Except for one woman, they were all sitting there wearing their orange dresses and dreaming about all these nice things to eat – if they had the possibility. This was not at all what I imagined. Afterwards, I went to the second family in a completely different town.

In the course of these three months, I participated in Hindu celebrations now and then. For example, I can remember this so called full moon festival where about ten thousand or maybe even hundred thousand of people were participating. There, I experienced masses of people, all possible sorts of fragrances and smells, as well as a lot of sounds and languages I could not understand. All this was covered in a mist of sand and dust sliding through all the feet like a cloud between heaven and earth. Nobody could tell me what all this was about and why it is happening. That was my key experience because from this point on, I wanted to understand why people would do this. Back to Basel, I wanted to study something in this field – at that time I thought it would be Religious Studies. I asked about the *Abitur* again and this time they told me that could indeed take about four years, but that – if I would work hard enough – I could skip one semester as well. I decided to complete my *Abitur* within two years and this is what I finally did. During the holidays, I was always learning beforehand and in this way, I managed to continue with the respective semester. In the evenings, I was working as a reporter to make some money on the side, and during the day I went to the classes freely selectable. In the end I had my *Abitur* in eleven subjects – the Swiss *Matura* – which took partly place in Bern and partly in Zürich. I did this without any problems and kept on dreaming about it for years, even after my doctorate. In 1969, I started to study in Basel.

Basing on your key experience in India, why did you decide to study *Ethnologie*?

In Basel I could have studied Religious Studies, but it was actually a part of Theology. The teacher was a theologian as well having a strong connection to Christendom. I just went there a few times. During my school time, I had a teacher who was really fascinating me. Originally, he was Hellenist and thus, he was speaking about Greek mythology very often. In order to familiarize myself with these ideas I even learned Greek for some semesters. I chose *Ethnologie* because it was the field being as close as possible to the content I had in my mind. I was lucky Alfred Bühler was still teaching at that time: He gave quite unrestricted lectures which made it rather a sort of storytelling. I was really impressed by this. He was the final impulse. Back then, Mr. Schuster just came to the Basel University. The minor subjects though were quite hard for me. For example, I went to some classes of Early and Pre History but there – casually speaking – they were sorting out arrowheads. Accordingly, I decided to do *Ethnologie* and thus, I met Professor Hans Trümper.

Was Basel the only possible place to study or could have gone somewhere else?

During my studies, I continued my work as a reporter for different journals and I had to be around Basel all the time. Additionally, I could stay at home for free. The idea of leaving did not even come to my mind. However, what I wanted to do – and finally managed to do – was to go to another university for one semester. This was exactly what Mr. Schuster recommended as well.

Could you describe Mr. Bühler as both a person and a lecturer?

From my point of view of those days, he had an age I could barely imagine; for me, he came from another world. With his incredibly humanitarian character he was amazing in the way he both spoke to the students and about his topics. It was not just about facts or theories, but it was all based on this stunning humanitarian personality which really fascinated me. He was very lenient as well – compared to my own academic requests with the students – and he was mainly shaped by both the university and the museum. He was a person who loved to collect and always enjoyed to stay at a foreign place as long as possible. In his advanced age, he stayed in India for quite a while, but he actually never did these things – as far as I know – which were considered as stationary field research. He had a lot to say about people and culture; he actually communicated an overview. This was the case in his lectures. I just did one seminar with him.

Where would you put him in terms of theory?

He was very interested in theoretical issues; he had great accomplishments in this field, for example for the Ikat technique. He had a systematic approach. I think he was one of the big museum ethnologists, who did even not just collect and accumulate. He worked on the foundations of systematic proceeding and comparison as well – especially in the field of textile techniques, his special field. Unfortunately, this field was not continued later. Today, even the museums just barely do systematic research on objects. For me, this was his great accomplishment. Above that – and this is closely connected to his technical research – he was very interested in cultural history: How did things or technical actually develop? How can I explain that a specific textile technique is only used in one single place on the world – namely in East India, in a specific village in Bali? These were the things which fascinated him. Instead of drawing overhasty conclusions, he tried to – with the help of detailed technological studies – to show relationships, possible innovations or transfers. As far as I know, he also never cheated, as he always made possible gaps and missing links the topic of discussion.

How many students were there for the subject?

We were about a handful. In one seminar I did with Mr. Bühler we were about ten major and minor students including the doctorate candidates. The number of students was increasing quickly in the 1970s. At the beginning, there were about twenty persons, then thirty and more – but there were never these masses I experienced in Germany.

Besides Mr. Bühler, were there any other lecturers?

The Basel Department of *Ethnologie* has always been a one-man-institute. There was an assistant lecturer called Peter Weidkuhn. I think he was a highly intellectual person, namely an unconventional thinker – he had basically no social skills. He always had this anti attitude against both Bühler and Schuster. It was both fascinating and repulsive to see how he tried to get the students on his side. I always admired the way Schuster handled the situation, as he never delivered this to the outside. Mr. Weidkuhn, in turn, delivered basically everything to the outside. For me, the ambiance at an institute, namely the atmosphere between the lecturers, is something very essential. I think it is even more important than single excellent personalities because the atmosphere of an institute is both motor and motivation for the students.

What kind of change happened when Mr. Schuster began to work?

Mr. Schuster is a very sociable person packed with incredible social skills and a very open mind. He is quite undogmatic and not tied to a specific theory. You could naturally see Jentsch's influence – basically the one of cultural morphology – but in a very open-minded way. Theories were not his centre of attention and neither did Schuster systematically teach theories. We did speak about Malinowski, Lévi-Strauss and others, but we never discussed the issue of practising these theories: How do we do that and what does it actually mean for my own work? Other people were more concerned with these things and thus, they were working much more theoretical than I did. I had a rather empiric-practical orientation. I started to work without any theory and in the course of the years, I began to be more and more theoretic – for me, theories are helpful tools, but they are not the centre.

Although Mr. Schuster was working at the museum – he was particularly fond of the Oceania collection – he did not get stuck on a topic of the material culture. The textile research built up by Bühler for decades began to fade away. However, the museum and the institute were always working together very closely; this was continued through the practical museum assignments and the lectureships of Bühler's former doctoral candidates.

What was the subject Anthropology like back then?

It was mainly about traditions and myths – putting it in a broader way: narrative research. Only with great difficulty I managed to complete my anthropological studies. Actually, I was not very delighted about my combination of subjects: I did Anthropology as a first minor, and as a second one I chose – basing on Bühler's recommendation – Sociology. There I learned a lot about theories. This subject became my first major subject later.

Was there a connection between anthropologists and ethnologists at that time?

Yes, it was a very intense relationship. They were neighbouring institutes in the Old Town of Basel which were also offering some courses together. This was mutually supportive. Mr. Trümpy was very interested in comparative studies as well, as he came from the field of Philosophy and he was also concerned with cultural historical and historical matters. He remained within the Swiss-German region though. In 1971, I went to Munich for one semester.

What was your impression of Munich? Did Baumann already left at that point?

His personality was all over the place, it was an almost cult atmosphere. Back then, I still had the plan to specialise on Africa which is why I went to Mr. Straube who seemed to be very Prussian to me. What I found very positive though – and it was new for me – was the social contact between the students. I made friends with the leading group of students immediately; we were really close to each other and they were politically active as well, without being part of the radical '68 movement though. Hermann Amborn was one of the intellectual pioneers at that time and there were two or three more. In this respect, it was a great time and just going to the cantina to have a beer there was something completely new for me as well.

While I was in Munich, I went back to Basel from time to time in order to see my husband. During one of these visits, Mr. Schuster asked for me in order to tell me that he is planning a big New Guinea project with some students. He wanted me to participate even if I had no intention specialising on Africa. I shortly thought about it until I just took this unique chance and agreed. In 1971, I did not just spend a semester in Munich, but I married as well and I got a part-time position as a curator at the museum in Basel including the field of museum pedagogy and public relations. This position was actually advertised for a scientist with doctorate, but I managed to get in in my fourth semester – accordingly incredibly early! The reason for this was that I, as a reporter, could already use a quite broad network, as well in terms of public. I was well-known in Basel at that time and since my ethnological knowledge was increasing, this was the ideal linking for the museum. This position was just made for the establishment of public relations.

In 1972, I went on the expedition to the Sepik River in the context of the New Guinea project. I could just go for half a year because I was still working part-time and there was no chance for me to get a longer holiday. Besides me, Mr. Schuster, his wife and five further students were participating: Jürg Wassmann, Markus Schindlbeck, Florence Weiss, Milan Stanek and Jürg Schmid. Schmid was the only one who gave up his studies later. All of us went to different villages.

What was this field research like? Were there any specific research questions?

For me, the topic was clear right from the beginning. The issue of gender was something I was concerned with already very early, naturally also because of my biography and the trend at that time – it simply was the time of the feminist's movement. Thus, I prepared myself with reading all the feminist literature just like Simone de Beauvoir and Margaret Mead. In this way, every participant of the research journey had his own topic coordinated by Schuster. He wanted us to research in various different fields so that we could compare our results in the end. All of us were writing our doctoral thesis in the end, but it came not to a real bundling. Unfortunately, it did not go beyond these simultaneous but individual researches.

If you transfer your topic – gender relations and role of the woman – to the context of your studies and your work in Basel, what did people have to expect?

I was very much shaped by my socialization. Gender issues were an arising topic and for me, it was, among other

things, the impulse to write my doctorate thesis about it. At the same time, I do not think that this inequality had the same impact on our daily life at the museum or the university. I think that we – male and female curators – had about the same salary. It was quite noticeable though that all the women were working part-time and most men were working full-time. The intelligence and the intellectual coping were one thing, but the habitus, upon which we did not even reflect sometimes, was a completely different issue. I recognized a lot of things back then, but I would have not been able to formulate it in the same way I can do today. Naturally was gender important, but in a different way. It was not that important though for Bühler though who was particularly supporting women. I think gender was not a big problem for Mr. Schuster as well because he explicitly wanted Florence Weiss and me to participate into his expedition. There were indeed some professors who were literally ‘hitting’ on the female students. This is just the way it was. It will be the same case today, but now the lecturers know exactly what they have to deal with. Back then, it was mostly very clumsy and it was hard to get away from these advances. We were not sure if it is not simply a part of the whole thing. In comparison to today, it is, of course, a completely different situation, since every female student knows very well that this is not a part of their studies. There is even a specific shelter where female students suffering from sexual harassment can go to complain.

During your time of studying, were there any contacts with other universities of study groups? Did you participate into international conferences as well?

Well, I began to study in 1969 and I was also working as a reporter. In 1971, I started to work part-time at the museum and in 1972 I went to New Guinea for six months. From the moment I got back I started to work on my doctoral thesis. After twelve semesters I had completed the whole studies as well as my doctorate. However, I definitely met my limits. I wanted to leave this intense period behind me as fast as possible because I knew that nobody could live with under such pressure in the long-term. I wanted to release the result of the material’s richness and of basically everything I had been reading with great commitment, so that there was barely time for any other activities. I had almost no contact to study groups, but I was a member of the *Schweizerischen Ethnologischen Gesellschaft* (‘Swiss Ethnological Society’). I experienced as a male society where gender definitely played a role, maybe because there were no female professors at that time.

If you compare, with hindsight, the circumstances of German and Swiss field of *Ethnologie* during the time until your doctorate in 1975, are there any differences? Or did people rather consider themselves being a part of a German-speaking region?

It depends. We often went to conferences of the ‘*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde*’ (DGV) [German Anthropological Association (GAA)] and we realized that ethnological field in Germany was simply much bigger and had more variety. Something that was new for us was the radicalism. There some scientists from Zürich playing an active role in the ‘68s revolution as well, but they had a quite different background. In this context, Switzerland was rather a follower. Swiss students simply had no Nazi past. It was not the same establishment. When I came to Germany I just realized how great the impact of German history on *Ethnologie* actually was. I was not aware of that back in

Switzerland. We felt like a part of this German-speaking region, but we never saw us as a part of this historical tradition. Likewise, Mr. Bühler set himself apart in this respect. For him, the Germans had their own specific history.

What was it like in Switzerland in terms of German colleagues like Mr. Marschall or Mr. Schuster?

They did not bring the ‘German historical burden’. I can just answer this question spontaneously now, but I had the impression it was quite a release for them to get away from this historic entanglement. I cannot remember they I had ever heard something about it in one of Mr. Marschall’s or Mr. Schuster’s lectures.

Was it possible though for Swiss *Ethnologie* to work free from the historic burden?

Yes, I would say it like this – whereby the German-speaking Swiss *Ethnologie* was mainly focused on the museum back then. By now, it is not possible anymore in the intellectual milieu to separate German-speaking Swiss *Ethnologie* from the German or Austrian *Ethnologie*.

An important difference between Swiss *Ethnologie* and German *Ethnologie* might be the administrative embedding: It was a horror for me to work with German administration. In Switzerland, it was much easier – at least at my time – to get direct contact with the ministries, as we did not have these long and complicated administrative channels. One of the first things I received in Göttingen was a warning letter because I directly contacted the ministry and thus, I violated the strictly regulated official channel – which was totally unknown to me. I could have never imagined such an ultra-administration of the university and I found it – and still find – horrible in every respect! Likewise, the administration of resources and all the endless formula are a nightmare, especially the impossibility of getting in touch with somebody directly and spontaneously. That was huge difference to the field I was familiar with. I have no idea if it is a sort of Prussian system, but in Switzerland, I could just call the ministry or write a letter to the minister. Everything was smaller and easier to understand, the administration as well. In Germany, this direct way is unimaginable this happens at the expense of creativity.

The merciless character of public discussion between colleagues is another difference to Switzerland – this is subsumed as the ‘debating culture’. I did not even know this expression. The thing missing in Germany are kindness and a fundamental sympathy, just like the Americans, in turn, are exaggerating. Like a common ground reuniting everybody. I really miss that and this has made me quite cautious when it comes to other colleagues.

During your time at the museum in Basel – from 1971 until 1981 – were there any changes concerning your position or your field of work?

After my doctorate, I wanted to focus on the work at the museum, which is what I did: From the perspective of museum education, I built up the Egypt exhibition and I invented new things as well. For example, I had the concept of this children’s exhibition and I organized workshops for them where they could understand the Egyptian handcraft techniques. Anyway, after some time it was simply enough I was tired museum education and public relation work. Just like being a report, it is a strenuous job. In addition, it was my wish to continue working as ethnologist since I was

highly interested in scientific matters. I wanted to do a research project which could be combined with my work or even be a consequence of my job. This research project I had been working out was given in the hands of Mr. Schuster who was the final applicant at the Swiss National Research Foundation. However, it was my own project though that I realized by myself: a field research about the cult houses of the Abelam people in New Guinea. Thanks to Mr. Bühler and René Gardi, Basel had one of the biggest Abelam collections in the world and it has been always the idea – in case of a museum renovation – to build a cult house as well. They already had the façade and a painted gable wall which was about thirteen meters high. They wanted to exhibit the whole wall and, they maybe wanted put a house next to it as well and make a detailed documentation. That was the impulse and I finally did a year of field research in the environment of these houses. Moreover, I told Mr. Schuster about my desire to habilitate myself after I came back from New Guinea. He seemed to be surprised.

Why did you want to habilitate?

I wanted to get away, as well from the museum; it became too narrow for me. Additionally, I was not interested in continuing the public relation work and I wanted to find a new field of activity. I did not directly think about being a professor, but I was interested in the research. I wanted to teach as well but for me the one thing was always connected to the other. I specifically wanted to discover new topics with my own researches since I was tired of the permanent reproduction which is more or less necessary for both museum and public relations work.

Which position did you represent with your work at the Museum of Basel? The debate of the 1970s was about the rather text-intensive orientation on the one hand and the object-orientated way of presenting on the other. How would you describe your work regarding this debate?

With my work I tried to make the tactile aspects the centre of attention. This was something new back then and people were still about those doubles, namely the objects which were supposed to occur twice within the collection. I could perfectly use these for the children and adults who wanted to feel and experience the different objects. I brought particular objects back from my research journeys which with the intention to emphasize the physical contact and to give them a feeling for materials and forms. I also went to schools with my concept; at that time, the first borrowable cases filled with those original objects were created. It is still a 'must have' today, but back then it was something totally new; I invented this at the Museum of Basel. I also did an exhibition about the Abelam which was organized along the different areas of life. Those objects people could touch were the centre of attention; a little more in the background, we had those objects people must not touch. For me, it was not about communicating some abstract topics, but I rather wanted to convey a feeling of proximity. The centres of my practical work at the museum were both the correspondence and the comparative perspective on culture: 'How do they do it? How do we do it?' This bridge, namely the others and we, was not supposed to create a difference. It should rather make people conscious about the fact that people might live under different circumstances and they might use different material, but they still have the same needs, asking for the same solution or feeling delight about exactly the same things than we do. This was the central component of my work. This was the bases for the first comparative works in Basel as well. Together with the respective regional

curators, we organized three exhibitions: Building and living, clothing and decoration, eating and drinking. It was the aim to create topic-orientated exhibitions telling about different areas of life – of course with geographic variety and always including the ‘we’ aspect. Again, we wanted to convey proximity and variety, as well as unity and agreement. In retrospect, I think this was my orientation back then and also the impulses I gave to the museum.

Could you maybe explain this idea of tactility more detailed?

Up to that time, most exhibitions were simply exhibitions of display cases and the objects were mostly intellectualized. In contrast, I was rather concerned with the human senses. Through the display cases you could see the object, read and sometimes even hear something about the object, but the most important thing, which actually characterises the material – the feeling – was no part of the museum experience. For me, the human being is, above all, a *homo faber*: he makes things with his hands, which, in turn, is stimulating his thinking. Humans are persons who are building and trading and thus, their hands are a central aspect. Back then, I tried to break through these ideas of non-touching and showcase thinking because the physical experience, namely the sensitive aspect, is a *conditio humana*. I can feel if the object I am holding is made of cold, hard or soft material. The physical experience is the centre of attention and the intellect comes second. This was one of the fundamental topics I was concerned with at my work and which I tried to realize – back then, it was rather unreflecting. Far later, the same idea was the impulse for my research project about organ transplantation and reproduction medicine: I was investigating in which way such discourses and practices present the human body as an object and its actual corporeality was cut off.

In 1985, you write your habilitation about cult houses of the Abelam basing on a field research over there. How did you learn the languages?

I simply have to admit I did not learn them. I was trying desperately, as well for the Iatmul language, but I think that none of us could really manage to speak the language in the end. Some could understand more words and follow a normal conversation, and some were less successful. Papuan languages are highly complex; both Iatmul and Abelam as these two languages are related and have a lot of common features. Thus, the vocabulary was not completely new for me every time, but the words simply had a different meaning each time. It might be comparable to the relation between Spanish and Italian. Without any doubts, I could really understand what people were talking about, as I had a quite broad vocabulary, but it was never sufficient to do research in this language. Likewise, there was the Melanasiian Pidgin (Tok Pisin) which might sound like an awkward language for untrained ears – thirty years ago maybe even more– but this is not true at all: With the help syntax variation you can express highly differenced things in Tok Pisin. At the same time, it was an obstacle to actually learn the native language because the natives tended to switch to Tok Pisin as soon as they noticed that we were stuck with our limited vocabulary. In general, the communication with women was much more difficult with women than with men. I was mainly dependent on younger women as the older ones were barely speaking Tok Pisin at all – but anyway, it was indeed possible to a field research in this language.

Did you go to the field alone?

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No, my husband came always with me. He organized the actual building of the cult house in Basel as well. He rather investigated the hand craft and I was responsible for all the inner connections. Thus, it was my task to take care of the 'invisible' aspects, like the social and religious organization of the cult houses.

What is your husband's profession?

Originally, my husband learned a craftsmen profession and he had his own business in Basel. When we moved to Göttingen – we suddenly felt like 'strangers' – he was prohibited to work. Since we arrived in Göttingen, he took care of the household which was a great help for me as I had chance to completely focus on my work. He accompanied on almost every field research and he always enjoyed it. In the course of all these years, he turned out to be very talented photographer – it was and it still is his favourite hobby.

Was there any impact on the field research having a supporting husband by your side?

There are two levels. One the one hand, it is much easier to cope with the emotional pressure – which is a part of every field research – when there are two of you and you can talk things over. Thus, I never had to suffer from the field research rage since I could always talk to somebody.

When a man and a woman going on a field research together, it happens very fast that people suggesting that the woman should go with the other women and the man should stay with the men. It was not difficult with the Iatmul to be with the women. My husband was there often though, especially because we had to take the canoe to go there. I really did not feel confident to do that on the massive Sepik River which had fluted the whole area. It was nothing negative though amongst the women and they found great and they wanted to have such a husband as well who wants to spend time with them. The men, in turn, could not understand that my husband was spending so much time with me, a woman, and that he was not sitting with them in the men house. They regarded him as an effeminate man and they let us know about their view. With the Abelam, where I was investigating the cult houses, accordingly a male topic, I got to hear from time to time: 'Now, you go cooking with the women and your husband comes with us to the cult house'. This would have been different if I would have come there on my own. All in all, I had the social stats of a white woman so that I was no part of their two-sex social system.

But you were rather pushed into their system because you had a man with you?

Yes, I would say it like this. Especially, when it is such a society where gender is an important criteria. It was not that important on Bali since gender is not that significant over there – but it is in New Guinea. Whereby, it also came to the same situation over and over again in Bali: I interviewed a man and asked him some questions. The man directed his answers only to my husband ignoring me without a second glance. It was harder though for my husband, since I just had to listen and I there was no need to give these encouraging and confirming nods all the time: I could just listen free from stress and already think about the possible next question.

In the context of gender, I have to say that I may have habilitated about cult houses, but I finally wrote my habilitation presentation about the exchange of women in Micronesia. Thus, I remained faithful to the topic – by the way, I still do up to today.

After your habilitation, did you apply for professorships or for other positions?

In 1986/87, I had been teaching for one year in Fribourg in Switzerland. That was about the Höltker collection, accordingly about religion, but also about objects. I loved to work on this topic. Moreover, I began to write applications – initially in Switzerland and in the close area, since I could have never imagined leaving Basel. My husband was quite open for other locations, he would have come with me, but my family roots were very important for me. My parents got older as well. We lived together in a semidetached house, my parents, my husband and I. This was something like a cohabitation I did not want to give up. I was not particularly interested in a professorship; I rather hoped to get the position of Mr. Weidkuhn once: It was a job as a chief research assistant, namely a lot of time for research, a little time for teaching – a perfect mix.

Finally, I began to broaden my area of application. I was even asked to stand in for a professorship in Cologne. I accepted and at that very moment, I realized that people were noticing me on the job market. Finally, I successfully applied in Göttingen and became the successor of Erhard Schlesier.

During your time as curator in Basel were you giving lectures at the university as well?

I did it on a private level – and since 1991 as an Associate Professor – I was obliged giving lectures, of course. Mr. Schuster asked me to give lectures – I do not know why. I would have loved to give a seminar as well, but I just followed his request. I familiarized myself with basically every possible topic and I really enjoyed it. The students were very good and lively as well; they supported me a lot during my professional change from the museum to the university. In 1991/92 I was appointed to Göttingen. The department of education would have given me a professorship in Basel. I mentioned that while I was engaged in negotiations with Germany, and I was incredibly torn regarding this decision. Should I stay or should I leave Basel? Mr. Weidkuhn was reaching the retirement age at that time, and the ministry said they would invest the money in a second professorship in Basel. Mr. Schuster recommended me to accept in Göttingen; maybe I could come back after his retirement. He finally remained in his position until he turned seventy. It was too late for me then since I was already fifty-six as well – I somehow really regret this. All in all, the first years in Göttingen were a quite painful time for me, especially as my parents got sick as well and they finally died. My mother never could never cope with the fact I left her at the end of her life. On the other hand, Göttingen was an opportunity for me to widen my horizon and to discover completely new research areas I would have never had in Switzerland. After my years of studies, I was quite unbiased so that I could begin a totally new biography. I think this is a great opportunity which I really exploited it to the maximum and I gained a lot of experience.

What was the situation in Göttingen like when you arrived in 1989? Which kind of expectations did people have?

The expectations were quite diffuse. Including Erhard Schlesier, all the former heads of department were oceanographers and thus, it may be expected that the position would be advertised for oceanology this time as well. Due to the strong student lobby though, they did not tie the position to a specific field. At the beginning, it was not easy for me in Göttingen: There were parliamentary groups and differentiated loyalties. The change from a young researcher to an actual professor was a change of status as well – suddenly I was, so to speak, ‘on the other side’.

It was the first time I saw such a great number of students when I began to teach in Göttingen back then. Naturally, my lectures in Basel were very well attended, about forty to sixty students. In Göttingen, in turn, there were masses of students and the fluctuation was very high – there were hundreds of students I would see occasionally, but they had not necessarily the intention to study properly. Being a student seemed to be nice philosophy of life for most of them. In terms of quality, there was a great difference and, even today, I still think that Swiss students are more willing to work hard compared to German students.

Likewise, the institute was changing just like it does today. Mr. Fuchs was still there, but after two years he retired. On my first day at the institute, Mrs. Benzing just left to Addis Ababa for the next two years. Thus, everything fell to me. First of all, I tried to provide the course of studies with a systematic structure – accordingly, a system based on the work I already did with my students in Basel.

When you came to Göttingen there was no structured system though?

Not as it is known today. Afterwards, Mr. Braukämper came to the institute and we turned out to be great colleagues. The concept was to offer a selection of basic topics that we would be teaching alternating – a course of studies which is subordinated to a particular interest with specific demands, and the aim to teach theory as well. This worked out very well. We could realize spatial questions as well. At that time, we still had heavy arguments with some students regarding themselves as follow-ups of the ’68 generation. Sometimes, they barricaded the lecture halls and they kept using the best rooms for their meetings. Mr. Schlesier was not able to fight back anymore and thus, it was one of my first tasks to bow them out of the rooms or to give them another room. It was about setting priorities. One of them was library. Accordingly, there was opposition on this level as well which I felt very clearly at the beginning, but soon the time came when I realized that I was supported in my efforts from various sides. Then, things turned out to be very positive.

In Göttingen, our institute changed the department later as well. Initially, we were accommodated in the department of Philosophy where they had the Department Board with a system of representation – I did not know that from Switzerland. *Ethnologie* was not represented in this Department Board of Philosophy and thus, we had no clue about the things they were discussing and deciding. The big subjects – Philology, History and Philosophy – were rather dominating. At that time, the department was a male domain; today, this has completely changed. If the Department of *Ethnologie* ever wanted to achieve something or just be realized by the university at all, we had to change the department. The department of Social Studies seemed to be just the right thing and thus, the subject of *Ethnologie* would perfectly fit into this clear spectrum of subjects. After our switch to this department, we were treated equally and we could actively participate in all assignments and aims of the department. This gave a fresh impetus to the subject.

Back then, you were running an institute and at the same time, you were one of the few female professors in the field of German *Ethnologie*. Were there any obstacles regarding these circumstances?

There were no obstacles at all regarding the subject as such. The Department of Philosophy was treating the few women like ladies, but we were not regarded as equal colleagues. The working parties were definitely male working parties. However, all these things happened under the surface and you could have never spoken that out loud.

In terms of the conformity process, a lot of things have been changing, also compared to other subjects like Philosophy. How can you explain this particular boom of *Ethnologie*?

I think this radical change is not just positive. If you have a look at the numbers, there are much more women amongst the students. Do the old concepts of gender still play a role here? It might be connected to specific experiences in life, which are still present today and perhaps, they may even base on concrete empirical values – and thus, they are right. Just like fact that a woman has the intention to marry, and she does this cleverly so that it is no longer important how much money she makes. I believe that for men, their choice of studies has to apply different criteria than it has for women. *Ethnologie* has become a women's subject and I am just wondering if a subject having such a great proportion of women will still be taken seriously in public.

In terms of your own work you said that you began to work on material things and that you then became increasingly theoretic in the course of time. Did your change to Göttingen possibly have an impact on this?

I do think so. On the one hand, I entered a new environment of German *Ethnologie* where the theoretical aspect had a totally different status. It is a field, in which you do not just know these theories, but you were actively confronted by them and you had to discuss them critically. On the other hand, I began to change – also in the context of teaching – my way of reading and working: I did not just look at the facts, but I began to ask: How is this done? Who wants to express what with this? Which means is he using and which explicit and implicit aims does the author have? In the course of time, this increasingly fascinated me. I am an enthusiastic field researcher though. I could barely think of another person who did as many field researches as I did – apart from Hans Fischer maybe. I went on a research journey every year and even right now, I am still running three empirical field researches: in Indonesia, namely in Sulawesi, in Bali and in Cambodia. It is no long time ago when I began to work even more theoretical. This began when I realized that the interpretation of my collected data – regional integration, political leadership and religion in Bali – was totally different from everything that was available in the literature. I asked myself: to what kind of data are these colleagues referencing? Was did they want to prove with this data? I could not understand, for example, the basis on which Clifford Geertz constructed the term 'theatre state'. How, why and for what did he arrange this data so that he could trace them back to the theatre state? Thus, I began to find it very interesting how students implicitly take over their teacher's theories and follow their tracks – at least to distinguish themselves. Putting it in a different way: I had a look how such theories can gather momentum on their own. I also wrote an article about this topic for the journal *Current*

*Anthropology*². This article was followed by many discussions which were finally continued in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*³. At the moment, I am working on this topic again because theories have a social environment they cannot be regarded separately. In my opinion, post-colonialism is just another expression of late capitalism. For me, it is an ideology, namely a theory as the consequence of neo-liberalism. These are the exciting things I am concerned with at the moment and I really enjoy going on with this.

Kuper says that postmodern *Ethnologie* is less popular in Great Britain, France, Switzerland or Austria than it is in Germany and America. Would you agree?

I am pretty sure it was poorly received in Great Britain since the local Ethnology has a fundament. There were no gaps like in Germany. German *Ethnologie* is still suffering from great insecurity, and exactly this insecurity was really annoying me during the years. The result is that most people do not pay attention to their colleagues' work. Instead, people are trying to find orientation in big American personalities and they are just complaining about German *Ethnologie*. They themselves do nothing though to support a German community. In this way, it may be expected that postmodernism, disbanding and relativizing basically everything, was very well welcomed in Germany as it was exactly the right environment. There are no fundaments in Germany, or at least people are too scared to start out from such a statement. This might a little flat, but it is completely different case in Great Britain or in France since there are specific leading theories – even if they were modified. Besides this self-laceration, I was also very annoyed by the fact that German *Ethnologie* never managed to find a common ground during all the years. The impulse should have been given by the Germans, not by me as a Swiss. This is a reason as well why I always said that I do not belong here. I do not want to discuss this topic, but I think it is more than necessary to finally leave behind the old Nazi burden – never forget it though – and find consolidation. I do not know if this is possible. I must admit that a great number of professors today come from outside of Germany and from a German-speaking area. There is no such thing like German *Ethnologie* anymore. It is something completely different to deal with postmodernism on the level of education. Here it is about communication fundamental knowledge – it may include certain diction, but it is not necessarily your own creed. Additionally, we should keep in mind that – besides the actual professors – there is still a broad spectrum of non-professional teaching stuff that is shaping and deciding the orientation of the subject as well. Sometimes, they are publishing even more than the professors. Postmodernism may be even stronger within this group of people than it is within the professors. If the professors have a less post-modern orientation though, it means in turn that such fundaments, as they are present in Great Britain and France, are not recognized at all in the German field of academic education.

One university which has always remained true to its path and still does today is the University of Cologne. They have a long history which is closely connected to the continuance of personnel and this goes even further. Nowadays, it is hard to find an institute with a regional and theoretic continuance. After all, this is also linked to the university's appointment strategies and to the guidelines of the ministry. In my opinion, this weakens the individual institutes because they are

² Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, The pre-colonial Balinese state reconsidered. A critical evaluation of theories on the relationship between irrigation, the state, and ritual.: *Current Anthropology* 2003 44(2): 153-182).

³ Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, Temple and king: Resource, management, rituals and redistribution in early Bali. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2005, 11: 747-771.

losing their entanglement and thus, they can be manipulated easily.

During the last years, was there a change that could help to leave this postmodern paradigm behind?

No, but to be honest, I do not have a proper overview at the moment. During the last years, I was mainly concerned with administrative work. I believe though that the next change in terms of implementation might have come – we ethnologists are in demand at the moment. What I do not know is if this implementation is any better than postmodernism.

People began to turn their attention again to those works back from the time of the Cold War – for example the Area Studies – about China, India and everywhere else. I cannot fully understand or evaluate the whole development, but there must be a reason why regional aspects are more supported again. Naturally, it is the economic compass giving the final impulse for the process of orientation. What are the consequences? The so called brokering services being needed in terms of migration are working for whom? Implementation is very important, but I have an uneasy feeling which is at least comparable to my feelings about postmodernism.

Are you saying that for you, the humanist claim in the context of the understanding of other cultures and ways of life is more important than the actual implementation?

I have always been a supporter of implementation, but we need a reflected way of implementation. It has always been my opinion that we as ethnologist cannot stand there saying that we do not want to get our hands messy. I already introduced the applied *Ethnologie* plus the corresponding discussion in Basel: What does implementation actually mean? Implementation does not just mean to do what the initiator has told you, but also to be aware of the tension and to know about the possible scope of action. You can try to make a difference for the better basically everywhere, even if you go to a military academy. It depends on the things you are doing in the respective environment and what you actually pass on to other people. There are great differences. Ethnologists who want to do something like this must be strong minded and not simply followers. Thus, I am indeed a strong supporter of implementation, but I am not sure yet what we are actually implementing. I could just say: implementation for the better.

From your point of view, which components are indispensable for *Ethnologie*?

Initially, I had to decide what is important for me regarding *Ethnologie* in general and in terms of education. I have actually constantly changed my fields of interest. I am not a person who needs to work through a topic from A to Z, for example the topic of gender. I think, during the education it is very important to recognize theories as theories, even in those texts who not primarily theoretic texts. Asking: How are articles written? What was the aim? Which media is used? Which aspects were taken into account? Which aspects were not taken into account?

If students are able to do such an analysis at the end of their years of study, we have reached an important aim. This demands the clear sensitization for theories, also when it comes to their own implementation of theories. Being on the spot, actually the regional aspect in general, is a central aspect for me. The concept of being ‘multi sited’ is just an

excuse to travel around and learn nothing about a region in detail. People were always raising objection against the concept of being on the spot, just like the ‘village in itself’: they create the impression that *Ethnologie* would have always been working monolithically. For me, it is the core of *Ethnologie* to experience a place – no matter where – with all its ramifications and in its whole complexity. This, of course, includes opening up for the outside worlds as well. It is not just about comparing the cultures, but it is rather about understanding it with its entanglements, ramifications and modifications. It is about more than simple situations of conversation; it is rather about developing a special sense what daily life actually means. I think this is important in the long-term. I have always told my doctorate candidates – except for a few persons – that they need to do a full field research and that they have to, at least once, get involved in another culture with everything it takes. You must have done this at least one in your life, after all to find your limits.

Which place is not the other culture?

If I go somewhere for three weeks – for example to Paris – and I keep on visiting the same place over and over again and then, I am doing exactly the same thing in New York for the next three weeks; there, I just talk to people in the context of interviews, but I have actually no idea how their life is going outside of these conversations when I am not there. A block of flats in Paris or New York can, of course, be ‘on the spot’, but it is not when I just go there once a day for the total of three weeks. You have to live there.