Visual Data Collection in an Insecurity Environment: Blangoua, Cameroonian Window on Lake Chad

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ABSTRACT

Once an anthropologist sets out a fieldwork, he/she faces myriad of challenges. While it is obvious that access to the target community is related to the prevailing socio-political context, there are even more constraints when data collection is carried out using an audiovisual tool. The aim in the present article is to share the field collaboration experience with informants in the locality of Blangoua. It shows how the audiovisual tool was an actual catalysis in this process, both for knowledge creation and for the discovery of certain latent realities among the youth of Blangoua. This paper endeavors also to highlight the visual anthropologist’s ambivalent position in his/her specific involvement out in research field. Thus, starting from the principle of shared anthropology (Rouch, 1968) which would like the researcher in visual anthropology to consult his informants and show them everything that is constructed as a message from their culture, we manage to detect “truths” that emerge consciously or unconsciously from the behavior of individuals.

Keywords: Blangoua, Data Collection, Insecurity, Visual Anthropology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Anthropology is an empirical science. The ethnographic research process is based on the collection of empirical data on which the researcher can therefore settle an analytical approach. Tuckman (1999) emphasizes that ethnography is about observing and interviewing rather than manipulating variables with external instruments. The analysis of other sources is also complementary to data collection methods in ethnography. Indeed, the collection of field data with the audiovisual tool favored by visual anthropology has developed in recent decades, which distinguishes this ethnographic approach from what is known as the “classic approach” of anthropology in this science. Visual anthropology is therefore gaining ground, producing marvelous film documents, and gaining more and more ground in the production and dissemination of ethnographic knowledge (Mouadjamou, 2021). In fact, as early as the 1930s, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead constituted what could be described as the exception that proves the rule at a time when the use of photography in anthropology was in marked decline (Macdougall, 2004). Although Bateson and Mead had different approaches, Margaret Mead thinks that social scientists should be quick to use new methods such as visual materials in their own fields that would simplify or improve their fieldwork. So, she “urged ethnographers to make greater use of all forms of visual recordings. Ironically, in view of her own pioneering work with Gregory “Bateson, she portrayed the main value of such visual recordings as residing in their documenting of disappearing cultures” (Aull Davies, 2008, pp. 129-130).

The method of selecting and working with local people in research and especially in the use of a camera in the making of an ethnographic film was explained by Seymour-Smith. According to this author, “One of the most interesting developments in modern ethnographic cinema is the training of informants to manage filming equipment, which allows them to structure the material according to their own conceptual schemes. (Seymour-Smith, 1986, p. 98). This rigorous approach makes the production of knowledge in images and by the image a harmonious process and linked to the methodological channels of the social sciences, making visual anthropology not a category, nor a particular cinematographic genre, but cinema and anthropology (Mouadjamou, 2021).

However, the collection of audiovisual evidence puts the researcher in front of additional challenges compared to the collection of data in general anthropology. This is the case when the socio-political context prevailing in the study area is not stable and when the researcher is interested in the types of activity qualified in the jargon of social science research as “sensitive” (Ganava, 2021). The integration of the researcher into such a community requires special arrangements. In “sensitive” terrain like that of Lake Chad, where illicit trafficking and insecurity intertwine, “the researcher finds himself […] in an uncomfortable situation where he must still adapt without losing sight of his research objectives. This uncomfortable situation that the researcher must manage in order to ensure the success of his
anthropological investigation becomes more complicated for those who use the camera as a research tool, like visual anthropologists” (Ganava, 2021, p. 88).

This paper aims, on the basis of methodological processes, to share the experience of collaboration in the process of collecting data with a camera. The present article will therefore be structured as follows: presentation of research context, perception of the researcher’s synoptic report in the field, presentation of different statuses attributed to the researcher by the community, ethnography of data collection conditions, and careful review of camera-related findings.

II. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The outbreak of “emergency”, “conflict” or “post-conflict” situations has subjected the field survey to new risks to which the researcher is called upon to adapt. However, the patient construction of a space of intersubjectivity between the researcher and participants is very often “undermined” (Dionigi, 2001, p. 5).

Following the incursions of the Islamist sect, Boko Haram in the Far North Region of Cameroon in 2013, Logone and Chari, Mayo Tsanaga, and Mayo Sava Divisions are considered “red zone”. Thus, on May 17, 2014, during the Mini-Summit in Paris on security in the Central African sub-region which brought together the French Head of State François Hollande, the Heads of State of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, the Cameroonian Head of State H.E. Paul Biya officially declared war against Boko Haram. That declaration of war became a kind of stimulus transforming the cross-border backbone of the three Divisions into an actual battlefield. Cameroon's entry into the war against the Islamist sect would lead to putting in place a number of restrictive measures in a bid to control the situation. These restrictive measures are among others; the closing of the borders between Cameroon and Nigeria, the epicenter of the Boko Haram enterprises, the ban on motorcycle taxis, curfews, etc. In Blangoua, the Cameroonian district closest to the epicenter of the phenomenon, these measures were not unanimous because they led to the revolt of youths who considered that as the pretext of extracting money from them.

That was in a context of insecurity and tensions which opposed the populations in general and the youths in particular to the administration, that I went to Blangoua to explore the strategies put in place by youths to be accustomed and adapt to the place. In reality, the economic activities of young people in that locality depend essentially on illicit exchanges. They are thus called upon to find alternative means to survive or else find means of circumvention in order to continue to maintain their established networks in the area. The decision of the local administrative authority to ban the Koro Mali (donkeys that transport goods on trolleys) was a trigger for the reaction of young people who considered the decision as some more measure. Then, they decided to ransack the premises of the Sub-Division and take away hundreds of bags of food, a special gift from the Cameroonian Head of State to the affected areas.

![Fig. 1. (a), (b), and (c) are the view of the Subdivisional office ransacked.](Source: Field photos, Author, 2014)

Indeed, in any anthropology, the elements that constitute the field context influence the conduct of data collection in the field. They can influence both the accessibility to field data and the relationships that the researcher builds between the environment and him. In my case, in addition to facing this contextual constraint that any anthropologist would have faced in a similar situation, I do a little more because I had a
camera with me. Moreover, my research partners and other social actors are not without developing perceptions of my presence in their communities. This leads us to develop more strategies to access information.

III. THE VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGIST IN THE FIELD: PERCEPTION AND REPRESENTATION

The anthropologist’s perception of a field of research depends on a better understanding of how and what his or her research subject matter is. This can be directly linked to the involvement in the research subject, “to the roles he/her has already undergone before in the local environment, the imposed identities he or she had to negotiate, and the new roles felt ready to assume” (Ayimpam et al., 2014, p. 25). In the logic of the research in Blangoua, there was almost what could be called “anthropology at home”. In this regard, Fatoumata Ouattara underlined that:

The investigative relationship is also a dialectical relationship between otherness and familiarity. Alcivity at least conceptually and class relationship that requires a familiarity necessary to access a better explanation of the social reality of others. Ethnographic practice involves methodological choices in relation to these epistemological questions. These choices are made according to the degree of familiarity and/or otherness that exists from the outset between the interviewer and the environment being surveyed (2004, p. 13).

In the vein of Fatoumata, there is a non-describable need for an epistemological break in the methodological approach of the researcher (Bachelard, 1967). In this logic, belonging to a society is one thing, but being able to understand and describe it in anthropological terms is another. For the fact that the researcher belongs to a community in which he conducts his studies does not guarantee ideality for collecting quality data, as this was pointed out earlier (De Sardan, 2000). Hence, the need to suspend value judgments in order to access productive epistemological questioning remains constant.

In fact, the locality of Blangoua was to a certain extent "home" since it was not foreign to us. Before conducting this research, I worked there for four years as a civil servant at the Multifunctional Center for the Promotion of Young People. This position allowed us to be in close contact with the youths and the administrative staff. Thanks to this position, were able to build relationships, even affinities with the local people. When I returned to the scene a few months later with our audiovisual equipment, everyone immediately thought that I had changed jobs. It was then a godsend for them, and especially for young people, an opportunity more than ever to be heard and spread out all the frustrations and abuses they face on a daily basis. It was therefore an opportunity to talk about political problems and participate in the management of public affairs. The presence of the camera was to allow in this sense to carry their voices beyond the locality and the researchers could recognize from then that the local people had also their points of view to assert.

As a result, I realized that the young people with whom I spoke regularly in popular areas of the city or during our professional activities, needed to be listened to. The young civil servant that I was yesterday became the cameraman of Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) or Canal 2 International, the two largest public and private channels in the country. Although these two chains are well known to all, they emit with difficulty in the Lake Chad area. The local people receive signals from Radio France Internationale (RFI), Radio, and Télé Tchad rather easily. Also, they are constantly listening to these channels because the RFI sporadically broadcasts the news in the Hausa language and the Chadian channels have programs in Arabic. Both languages are more accessible to the populations than those of CRTV or Canal 2, which are mainly broadcast in French and English. However, since it is a question of bringing their grievances to Yaoundé, CRTV and Canal 2 are ideal. It, therefore, becomes important to open up to the researchers and collaborate.

As regards to the local administration staff, to whom the researchers wanted to explain what they intend to do and with whom to submit their research certificate, it was absurd to see a scientist take an interest in these young people considered drug addicts and delinquents. Indeed, exercising for the most part in the resourcefulness, nearly half of the young people of Blangoua are dependent on tramadol (an opioid analgesic authorized for moderate to severe pain), a tablet that they consume as a pick-me-up. Mahamat Liman, a member of the municipal representation office of the National Youth Council (CNJC), told us that “in Blangoua, one out of two young people is a tramolian”. These officials and the law enforcement and security forces therefore do not see how these “junkies” can provide us with actionable information. However, some provided “reliable” information so as to quickly complete the present research instead of wasting time with thugs who would not be of great help to the researchers.
IV. VARIATIONS IN THE STATUS OF THE AUDIOVISUAL FIELD RESEARCHER

Field experience played out in the investigative relationships that the researcher chooses to maintain. According to Ayimpam et al. (2014, p. 25), the presence of the researcher can generate “tensions related to the permanent suspicion of being considered as an agent, a journalist, an informant or a spy sponsored by a project, the hierarchy [of the army or the police], the administration or a funder and to be treated accordingly”. Being in an area full of lack of trust, the researcher may run “physical or legal risks in the event that he is considered by the local authorities as an agitator or an accomplice in illegitimate or even illegal activities” (Ayimpam et al., 2014, p. 25). The data collection period in Blangoua was subjective to several statuses, the most important of which will be presented subsequently.

A. The Researcher is Perceived as a Cameraman for the Population

Perhaps it should be remembered that when I worked in Blangoua a few years earlier, I was called CC (Head of Center) for those who knew my services and Delegate for those who did not know much about it. In this locality, anyone who works in a public service other than education, health, the army, or the police and who has an office is called a Delegate. They can associate the noun of delegate with the activity of his service. So, for example, are termed as “Delegate Agriculture”, “Delegate Fisheries”, “Delegate Forest”, etc. As for me, I was called “Youth Delegate”. And during the data collection, CC or Delegate designation evaporated. I became a “camera” for some and a “cameraman” for others. They even witnessed disputes in which the protagonists justified that I am a no longer delegate, but I am now a cameraman because I now work for CRTV. Going to CRTV is for some a source of pride or an opportunity to express their Cameroonian citizenship. For others, this television channel refers to the State, which is only present to take from them what they have earned with the sweat of their brow, but absent when they have grievances.

Indeed, in this area, when such equipment was seen, it was that it was a reporting team from a television channel. And, it was usually CRTV or Canal 2, Cameroonian local channels. These often come to cover the visits of the great personalities (Minister, Governor, or Prefect) who come for tours or in transit when they go to the island of Darak. So, for them, if I am not a CRTV reporter, I am automatically a Canal 2 reporter. For those with whom I had some affinity before, there was no reason for them not to be filmed. It would be a way of excluding them or a deliberate choice on my part to do without them and make new friends. At the end of my last stay in the field, my tutor Abdoulaye told me that “you, the last time you filmed everyone, not me. This time don't try to leave without filming me”. It was a problem that absolutely had to be solved. Thus, I took the resolution to take some photos and a video that I gave to him. I found myself in similar situations several times. For those whose level of discernment is deemed acceptable, they tried to explain the situation to them; for the others, I was forced to please them by filming them, although these images were of no interest for my research.

This look towards me was also shared by those who came from outside. This is the case of the members of a team from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) who stayed in Blangoua Subdivision at the time of my research. They were in the locality to educate young people on the benefits of peace and living together. The strategy deployed to reach a large number of youths was to organize sports and cultural activities (inter-neighborhoods football championship, canoe race, traditional dances, etc.). As soon as the head of the delegation saw me with the camera, he asked me to cover the event. It was quickly accepted since it allowed me to discover another face of the youths in Blangoua. I therefore realized that this hard-working and stereotypical youth is also a producer and consumer of leisure. In addition, the administrative and security authorities who stigmatize them are just as proud to share these hobbies with them. This is the example of the Sub-Divisional Officer who is himself the captain of a football team. The head of the UNDP delegation therefore asked his collaborator to put away his camera and give me the opportunity to film the various activities.

B. The Researcher is Perceived as Spy for Military

As far as the difficulties to which the researcher may be subjected in a research field are concerned, Bouillon et al. (2005) used the concept of “sensitive terrain”. For these authors:

Some areas are qualified as sensitive in the sense that the objects of study are characterized by illegal or informal practices and where the main subjects of study are often marked by strong social stigma (squatters, migrants in transit, undocumented migrants, etc.); other fields (sometimes the same ones) are said to be “sensitive” in the sense that, methodologically, it proves difficult for the researcher to implement prolonged observation over time (because of the clandestine situation, because of the places of investigation and observation subject to sudden closures, because of relationships of trust made more difficult by immediate endangerment of the subjects of study, or quite simply because of the authoritarian regime which curbs the freedom of expression; other fields, finally, are qualified as “sensitive” because they express in a very concrete way the end of the monopoly of the researcher on certain subjects (Bouillon et al. 2005, pp. 23-24).
From this point of view, the field of research is a “sensitive field” in more ways than one. First, the economic activities (Tchoua-tchoua in Hausa referring to resourcefulness or business) practiced by young people are tainted with unorthodox or illegal practices, then, the security context in which this area of Lake Chad is immersed. And finally, observing all these situations with the camera made the situation more complex. Indeed, despite the administrative formalities with the Senior Divisional Officers for Logone and Chari in Kousseri who issued me with a research authorization, then with the Sub-prefect and finally with the Commander of Arms in the place who issued to me an authorization for shooting, suspicions about what was done with the camera in a "red zone" could not be dispelled.

For the military, my research would conceal latent objectives that I would refuse to clarify. I was considered as an informant or a spy. Thus, for more assurance, they befriended a young soldier who offered to accompany me on my journeys in the locality. Being particularly interested in what was was doing, the soldier always wanted to review with me what I recorded during his absence. After a few days of investigations, interviews, and filming in which he had actively taken part by helping me at times to hold the pole, he stopped following me. In fact, he was committed by his boss to find out exactly what I was looking for. It was after his withdrawal that they realized that some young people who were reluctant to participate in the surveys finally became interested. When I interviewed Ali Moulla, my key informant on this, he said that relations between young people and law enforcement are not good. The police see them all as suspects linked to Boko Haram and the youths take them as executioners, because they believe that they are not there for their security but rather to ransom them. It is moreover this situation of reciprocal mistrust between the youths and the forces of order that led the UNDP, in agreement with the Government, to launch a campaign to raise awareness among the youths in need for frank collaboration between the forces (army and police) and people. The slogan, as inscribed in the photo below, says a lot about the relationship deterioration between stakeholders.

Fig. 2. A football team with the UNDP banner. Source: Screenshots from the film “Tchoua-tchoua”, Author, 2018.

The suspicion of the police vis-à-vis my person stems from the fact that a few weeks before my arrival, images and videos circulating on social networks compromised the actions of the soldiers at the front against Boko Haram. These images had caused controversy among Mr. Issa Tchiroma Bakari, the Minister of Communication and Government Spokesman who denounced their authenticity during a press conference, and international organizations for Human Rights and Freedom such as Amnesty International which rather confirmed the facts. For law forces, it was essential to keep a careful eye on my activities so as not to fall into the trap of espionage.

V. DATA COLLECTION CONDITIONS: INSIDER OR OUTSIDER

The ethnographic approach recommended by James Spradley would require the ethnographer to base himself on the local mores of his respondents in order to be able to gather in-depth information from the local population. Thus, he asserts:

Ethnographers should not just make observations; they also participate. It is this participation that allows you to experience the activities directly, to get a sense of what the events are like, and to record your own perceptions. At the same time, the ethnographer can hardly become a full participant in the social situation (Spradley, 1980, p. 51).

In the context of research involving participant observation, the ethnographer needs to strive to combine the role of insider and outsider, as pointed out by (Spradley, 1980; Gerrish, 1997). During the present field survey, participant observation was one of the most favored data collection techniques for me. The effort behind this approach is to develop a relationship of trust with the informants and to "integrate" so that the presence of the researcher disturbs their activities as little as possible while leaving a margin of difference between the researcher and the informant, so that the observation also has its meaning (Spradley, 1980; Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). In this effort, my research in Blangoua revealed elements through which
I can see that I was “integrated” and others that show that I was “excluded” from field realities. These two considerations contributed fully to the analyses that were wanted to give to the different information collected. The figure below explains my position in the field, first as an insider and then as an outsider.

![Fig. 3](image)
(a) and (b) are illustrations of two situations of the researcher in the field. Source: Screenshots from the film “Tchoua-tchoua”, Author, 2018.

In several situations, integration into social life in Blangoua was felt. This integration into the study environment stems from the fact that I am young and from the fact of the profession that I previously carried out in the locality. First, the youths of Blangoua collaborated because I can speak their “language” as a young man and, flirting with their daily lives, I was taken as the one by whom their voices could be heard, and their grievances transmitted to Yaoundé. In this spirit, some young people wanted to share their meal and could discuss their problems, as can be seen on the board above. I also benefited from the cooperation of some young people because They saw me working with other young people a few years earlier and there was no risk in confiding in me. Cooperating would be rather beneficial because their grievances could reach their rightful place.

Similarly, most of the administrative managers of the place were former collaborators. No one feared my personality and was afraid to open up to me. This made it easier for me to access their comments on the youths in Blangoua with whom relations were not very good. As far as the security and law enforcement forces are concerned, the presence around them of a young person who could serve as their intermediary with the young people was important. In addition, I presented some administrative documents on which research topic on young people and insecurity appeared. This gave credibility with the law enforcement authorities who, at a certain point, offered to facilitate this investigation. It should be noted also that at one point, they wanted to take advantage at the time of research to explore the youths’ universe yet not fully accessible in Blangoua.

As an outsider, my ethnicity (Moundang) and the fact that I am of Christian obedience contributed in more than one way. Indeed, I do not know how many times the populations of Blangoua have asked me: “is there that in your house?” Or “Do you know this or that?” This was repeated when invitations were granted to share a meal or when to meet with them in their activities on the banks of the Chari River. These questions stem from the fact that in Cameroon, Moundang people are not “people of water” and that they know nothing about fishing or fish. However, it is difficult to globalize when it is known that Moundangs who live in the lake area of Lake Léré in Chad (Mayo Kebbi Division) practice fishing. These prejudices reappeared when speaking with the young bambé (dockers) who unload the bags of fish from the island of Kofia. These maintained that I could not carry a bag of dry fish. That’s why they were challenged and carried the bag so far. They were then very excited to see me going back and forth without interruption. Several people are seen stopping their activities to admire the scene. Then I understood that even though I did things with and liked them, I was still considered an outsider in their environment.

This observation was revealed more during the editing of my film “Tchoua-tchoua” (2018). In fact, I chose to be in my film, a bit like the ethnographic film method advocated by the French anthropologist Jean Rouch. I then wanted to include a scene where I am seen carrying a bag of fish. So that’s when I heard someone say that “he acts as if he is working” (Screenshot, Fig. 2). I can list several cases like this. Sometimes, during conversion, I am excluded because some young people chose to express themselves only in Kotoko or Shoa Arabic, claiming not to be able to express themselves in French. These young people are sometimes the ones who call others to order when they prove to be easy to answer sensitive questions, that is to say, those relating to the war against Boko Haram. Thus, when someone slipped in a word in Kotoko, it reflected a desire to direct their response and that my questions or my presence posed a problem. I am termed as an “outsider”. This is also what happened when one and the other had to fulfill their religious duties. At that precise moment, they asked me: “Robi, you don’t pray, don’t you?” It seems like praying comes down to being a Muslim and so if you're a Christian, you don't pray.
VI. DISCOVERIES RELATED TO THE CAMERA

The ethnographic film approach which aims to create a relationship between filmmaker and film was developed by Jean Rouch. His vision of the future ethnographic approach to film states that: His prospective reading of ethnographic cinema states that: “the anthropologist will no longer monopolize the observation of things. Instead, both he and his culture will be observed and recorded. In this way ethnographic film will help us “share” anthropology” (Rouch, 2003, p. 98). This approach of doing "anthropology differently" was noted by Paul Hockings (2003) in the Preface of the Third Edition of his book entitled Principles of Visual Anthropology. He thinks that: “one of the most insightful stylistic shifts we see during this core period is that ethnographic film began to give specific individuals a voice, and this sometimes quite a voluble one”. This was favored, in the 1970s, by the evolution of cinematographic equipment technology which allowed the creation of synchronized video-sound cameras. In the collaboration with my informants, the camera helped develop a shared understanding of experiences and the dynamics of behavior in the Tchinchina marketplace.

Many things happen in an environment like that of the Blangoua market as it can be observed in the photo below. In this atmosphere, many things are done and said in such a way that simple sight or even human hearing cannot easily identify. The camera is presented in this context as an additional eye and an additional ear capable of seeing and even listening during distraction or absence, as long as the recording could be in progress. It is this experience that is presented with what is discovered when browsing through the recordings after a day of filming.

Fig. 4: The Tchinchina market square in the morning. Source: Screenshots from the film “Tchoua-tchoua”, Author, 2018.

“Our money is the Naira, because you Cameroonians there... you are going to leave me...”. Such is a word inadvertently launched by a young person on the Tchinchina market square. This caught attention when I was doing my scene list after a day of filming. On this scene, I was initially interested in Ali Moulla Koufaini, my key informant, who received money in the hands of one of his clients after having concluded a deal. But the words of this young man caught the attention and thought it was important to dig deeper. Following the description of another scene, I was still listening to the same voice saying: “You come from Cameroon over there, you are coming to film us. We are suffering here. You Cameroonians, you are going to leave me”. I said to myself, this is one more reason for me to invest myself as best I can to understand what this young man is thinking. I approached our key informant. He first makes me understand that he is a "tramolian", as if to say that nothing good can come from him. This attempt of disinterestedness of Ali Moulla Koufaini with regard to this young man will in no way remove this desire from us to want to exchange with him. This is perhaps the key to discerning the relationships and the position of the young people of Blangoua vis-à-vis State institutions. I therefore insisted with Ali Moulla that he could lead me to the young man. One’s can see him sitting on the floor in this photo taking his “pick-me-up”.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.24018/ejsocial.2022.2.4.292
During a meeting with that young man called Oumar Moyo, he said that he is not interested in Cameroon. Besides, Cameroon gives him nothing. He eats by the sweat of his brow and he has nothing to do with Cameroon. Our conversion stopped after these two sentences. I have still some answers to this research’s concern from the other members of the band. Apparently, the youths in Blangoua completely rebelled against the State in those periods of war against Boko Haram since the multiplication of restrictive measures that the authorities have put in place to control both their activities and the movement of populations (traffic and trade) in Lake Chad has considerably reduced access to resources. In this situation, only the most affluent or those with special relations (with the authorities) see their activities prosper. This has therefore led some young people to believe that the measures put in place against the insecurity caused by Boko Haram are only a plot to favor a certain number of the wealthy in the place.

Truly speaking, this information would not have reached me if their investigation had not been recorded using a camera. The practice of reflexivity, very popular in visual anthropology, has been a great contribution to this level. The center of gravity of reflective empirical research, as Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) point out, has shifted from manipulating the material to taking into account, as much as possible, perpetual, cognitive, theoretical, linguistic, (inter) textual, political and cultural which constitute as the background of interpretations. This ethnographic approach makes sense in visual anthropology because it integrates the point of view of the informants into the process of analyzing the data collected so far. In the present case, it was after sharing research visual data with Ali Moulla that I was able to unearth youths’ views vis-à-vis the state measures in this period of war against Boko Haram. Thus, it is worth thinking that I wouldn’t come back to the informant if this innocuous word of Oumar Boyo was not in the recordings.

VII. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, collaboration in the field with social actors allows me to investigate their environments. As just seen, there are periods in this collaboration I find myself anchored in their activities and times when certain elements constitute barriers between me and my informants. However, as Clifford Geertz (1986, p. 90) so aptly pointed out, “The sense, exact or semi-exact […] of who […] your informants really are, does not come from the fact that they accepted as such”. It is the researcher’s ability to analyze the modes of expression of social actors or “their symbolic systems” that testifies to his acceptance or integration into his field of research. In the present case, I am considered both an insider and an outsider. These two statuses have contributed, in one case or the other, to the discovery of social relations in Blangoua in general and the daily life of young people.

In fact, in anthropology, the method of knowledge production has shifted from observation to participant observation and filmed participant observation. The camera, by virtue of its presence in the research field, contributes to reveal detailed information. Thus, the written, the oral, and the image unite to convey a single message: knowledge (Mouadjamou, 2021). As part of this work, the audiovisual tool has meanwhile constituted a real catalyst both for the creation of knowledge and for the exteriorization of certain latent identities among certain social actors in a critical research spot like Blangoua. It is by drawing inspiration from the approach of shared anthropology advocated by Jean Rouch and which consists in sharing the various productions: the clips and commenting on them with my protagonists, that I managed to find avenues for analysis and understanding of people’s aspirations. It is moreover this sharing of data (images) collected that has often given me directions on lines of research to follow or behaviors to adopt the next day. It was because the social actors saw themselves again in the different roles they played in their daily
life (Goffman, 1959) individuals and the scope of these acts. The case of young Oumar Boyo that we noted can be considered as a control case.

We can say that this ethnographic approach makes sense in visual anthropology because it integrates the point of view of the informants into the process of analyzing the data collected so far. In the present case, it was after sharing research visual data with Ali Moulla that I was able to unearth youths’ views vis-à-vis the state measures in this period of war against Boko Haram. Thus, it is worth thinking that I wouldn’t come back to the informant if this innocuous word was not in the recordings.

**Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

**References**


QR Codes:


Born in 1986 in Ngong, North Region of Cameroon, Robi Layio is a Youth and Action Counselor graduated at the National Institute of Youth and Sports (INJS) of Yaoundé (Cameroon) in 2012. He obtained a master’s degree in visual anthropology at the University of Maroua (Cameroon) in collaboration with the University of Tromsø (Norway) in 2018. His work focuses on topics such as border culture and young people in cross-border dynamics, the citizenships and trans-citizenships, ethnic-religious and socio-professional solidarity, and the resilience of young people to the security crisis with the Lake Chad micro-region as a priority research field.

R. Layio has directed four ethnographic films such as “Tchoua-tchoua, Survival Strategy”, 25 min (2018), “Back to Roots”, 11 min (2018), “When a River becomes a Border”, 24 min (2020) and “When a River becomes a Border”, 36 min (2022). He has been selected in various ethnographic film festivals around the world and he won the First Prize at the IX Moscow International Festival of Visual Anthropology, «Mediating Camera» in May 2021. In January 2022, his film “When a River becomes a Border”, 24 min (2020) was published in the Journal of Anthropolgical Film (JAF). He is currently conducting his PhD research in Visual Anthropology and working as a temporary teacher in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Sciences for Development (SASSD) at the Faculty of Art, Letters and Social Sciences of the University of Maroua.