

5. Data Collection and Processing

In this chapter I will introduce the methods of collection, processing and analysis of the data. All three steps of data handling are a process of data selection by the researcher. The type and quality of data collection depends on the kind of access the researcher has to the community. It further depends on what data she deems relevant for her research question – in this case, establishing and negotiating belonging. In this chapter, I will elaborate on where, when and how I carried out the data collection and how the spoken data was transcribed. In the first sections of this chapter (5.1, 5.1.1 and 5.1.2), the research field is described in terms of population, its geographical location and the social relations of its inhabitants. In section 5.1.3, the organizations and projects of the community are briefly introduced. The process of relating to the community's inhabitants and approaching the data collection in the field are presented as an ethnographic account in section 5.2. My own relations to the community members as a participant observer and their consequences for my fieldwork are illuminated in section 5.3. The corpus is introduced in detail in section 5.4, focusing on narrative accounts within the interviews (5.4.1), narrative accounts for visitors (5.4.2), other interactions with outsiders (5.4.3) and community interactions (5.4.4). The chapter concludes with an outline of my choice of data transcription and selection (5.5).

5.1. The Field

In order to understand the narratives of the community and how its members communicate their sense of belonging, some 'hard facts' about the community are necessary here. There are no community chronicles such as reliable church registers or other 'official' sources; therefore, the data provided here stems mostly from information granted by the community's inhabitants themselves, especially the Alianza's official representative (Javier) and my own observations during my four-months stay in the village. This is supplemented by a website⁶⁴ the community ran in the past, with some general information and several reports from national and international NGOs and governmental institutions where the Nueva Alianza is discussed. One of the published reports is Grosen's (2012) assessment of the economic development of the community enterprise with regard to the

64 <http://www.comunidadnuevaalianza.org>, last accessed 18.09.2017.

Danish Government's developmental program (PREMACA⁶⁵). Within this program, the community produced a promotional video in 2011 that is accessible on youtube⁶⁶. In this video the inhabitants tell their story and provide information about their current organization.

5.1.1. Population

The community consists of roughly 77 nuclear family units belonging to a network of around 40 families with wider family relational ties. All in all, the number of inhabitants comprises around 350 people. Even though the majority of adolescents leave for the bigger cities of Retaluheu, Quetzaltenango and Guatemala City at some point in their education to pursue vocational training or university degrees, the overall number appears to have remained relatively stable. This may be due to the fact that educated young community members tend to come back to the Alianza and apply their skills at home. This desire to return home after completing a professional education or university degree is expressed by all of my younger informants in the interviews. Apart from their accounts during the course of the interviews in 2009, this was also observable on the ground. Between my two research stays in 2009 and 2011, I saw a few of the adolescents leaving to pursue training or studies, while others came back having completed their academic or vocational training. As the community enterprise is able to provide jobs, young and well-educated community members come back to build families of their own. Hence, the Alianza, at least until 2011, had no issues with declining numbers of inhabitants due to emigration.

In terms of religion, the community comprises a mixture of a Catholic majority and a Protestant minority. While the Catholic community members used the church for many religious occasions and a monthly church service, the Protestant inhabitants had no specific building for religious purposes, but rather carried out services in the homes of members of the Protestant community.

5.1.2. Location and Structure

The community is geographically located on the foothills of two volcanoes. To reach the village from the nearest town Retalhuleu, people have to take a dirt track north, often covered in mud or blocked by brushwood. The Alianza people

65 *Programa Regional de Medio Ambiente en Centroamérica* 'Regional Program of Environment in Central America'.

66 Documentary "Comunidad Nueva Alianza" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_6pZq8rmqA, last accessed 27.08.2017.

take this ride around once a week to shop for groceries and run other errands in town. The students entering secondary education (around the age of 16 years) tend to go to town almost every day, as the community only provides education until the end of the *basico* cycle, when the students have completed their eighth year of school. The bus leaves once a day, very early in the morning if it is not broken (which happens more often than one would imagine). Other than that, jeeps drive past the community and may be ridden for a small amount of Quetzales. The journey is rather tiring, and most of the community members (old and young) told me that they prefer to stay in the Alianza and avoid trips to town. The neighboring communities further up and down the hill are within an hour's walking distance.

There is a main street running through the community (for orientation see figure 1). On its western side, the projects are organized around a nucleus up of the former house of the *patrono*. During my two stays, this house was operating as an eco-hotel with rented rooms equipped with bunk-beds, a kitchen and a bathroom. Other community projects are also located around the center. Back in 2009 this included a coffee mill, an office and macadamia nut processing facility, a spring water bottling facility, a health center, a bio-diesel and bio-gas refinery, as well as a bamboo workshop. In 2011, the latter two had closed down, leaving the other projects and the eco-hotel as active businesses. On the east side of the street, the Catholic church faced the center.⁶⁷ The school is located next to the church. Whereas the children took classes in a small building next to the macadamia facility in 2009, a proper school with separated classrooms had been built with the help of national funds in 2011. Following the street to the north, the community members' houses are located on the left and right sides, forming a denser dwelling circle behind the church and school, and another up at the intersection where a short street crosses the one in the north. The area is surrounded by thick rain forest and the cultivated fields of the macadamia and coffee plantations. The whole plantation has around 100 hectares of productive soil in the areas up and down the mountain.

In terms of transport connectivity, but also geographically, the community is rather isolated. The road heading north leads to another village a couple of kilometers away and ends there. To the east, the community is flanked by two volcanoes (Santa María and the smaller, still active, Santiaguito); forests and fields extend to the west and leave a view almost to the Pacific shore in clear weather.

67 In August 2016, the church was torn down. It is planned to replace it with a new one.

Figure 1: Simple Map of the Nueva Alianza



5.1.3. Organization and Projects

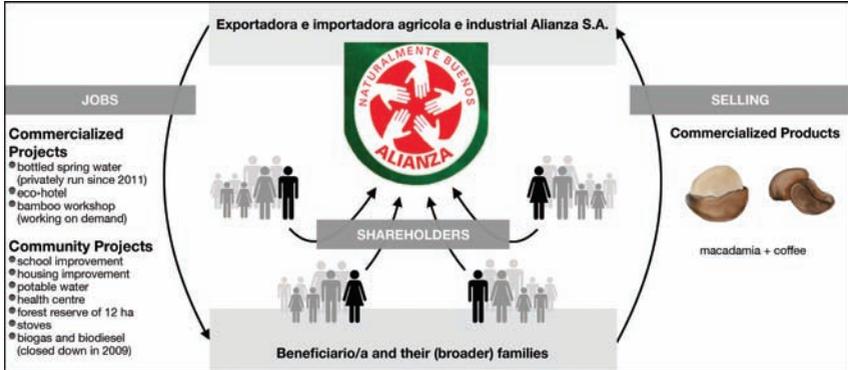
After the appropriation of the *finca* (see 1.2), the production and sale of agricultural products were conducted mostly informally (Grosen, 2012, 43). To make both processes more profitable and legal, the community sought assistance from the *Asociación Guatemalteca de Exportadores (AGEXPORT)*, an organization which helped them organize ‘officially’ as the enterprise *Exportadora e*

importadora agricola e industrial Alianza S.A. in 2008. Until 2011, 40 *beneficiarios* 'beneficiaries' – the heads of the families who were usually the father or the widowed mother – were shareholders in the company. In 2011, three shareholders and their families left the project. This made it necessary to redefine what it means to belong to the community project, and hence the community itself, and can be seen as one of these precarious moments where a continuous negotiation of belonging takes center stage (see 8.2). During my second stay in the community, these matters were negotiated publicly in community meetings and led to a feeling of unease for many inhabitants. The stories of the community Nueva Alianza and of the company *Exportadora e importadora agricola e industrial Alianza S.A.* are intertwined and affect the organization of the community. The enterprise focuses on the exportation of macadamia and coffee. It also implements the other commercial community projects aimed at paying back the debt to *Banrural*: the eco-hotel, the bottled spring water plant and the bamboo workshop making artisanal products and furniture. In 2011, the bottled spring water facility went bankrupt and has been leased by the Alianza enterprise to three private contractors from the community (Grosen, 2012, 43). The bamboo workshop only produced on demand when there was a specific order for furniture or small artisanal products from within the community or from the surrounding villages and cities. The company, however, also conducts social projects within the community: among others a health center, a school kitchen and better housing and living conditions for community members. All of these enterprises create job opportunities for people living in the Alianza, for example as cooks and maids in the eco-hotel, as masons and electricians in the building sector, as teachers in the school, nurses in the health center and accountants managing the financial aspects of the projects (see figure 2).

The fertile land surrounding the area was worked communally until 2011. Every family got the same share of the revenue from produce sold to the enterprise to be processed, packaged and exported. In 2011, during my second research stay, portions of land were assigned to the shareholders in a lottery. Now, every family owns a piece of land to grow macadamia and/or coffee plants and sells the raw fruit to the Alianza enterprise individually. This step was taken based on the interest of the majority of shareholders, who claimed that they wanted to retain a piece of land that could be inherited by their own children, or to sustain them in case the company went bankrupt again (something many of them experienced back in the 1990s). As we can see in figure 2, the community members

and the company are basically inseparable.⁶⁸ Either the inhabitants themselves are shareholders, or their fathers, mothers, uncles or some other close relative. Most people hold a position provided by the projects and/or they farm the land to harvest the product which is sold to the Alianza enterprise. The enterprise can be seen as a collective endeavor of the community.

Figure 2: Relations of the Community and the Company



In terms of organization, the enterprise is led by a CEO who is also the official representative of the workers union of the community (and, hence, something akin to a mayor). Javier holds both positions⁶⁹ and is the one organizing and chairing meetings (community and enterprise-related), inviting and coordinating assistance from incoming NGOs and other organizations and has an overview of accounts and administration. The different projects, then, are managed by an elected official and controlled and supervised by groups formed

68 During my first research stay in 2009, it took me a lot of time to figure out that there was a difference – at least a legal one – between the community and its entrepreneurial actions. The same people showed up for meetings regarding community issues (like discussions about how to best fertilize land or how to organize the school kitchen), and likewise for decisions within the realm of the enterprise (e.g. reports from Javier concerning company revenues or whether to buy a new vehicle for the enterprise). When my informants spoke about things “the community” does, often they were indeed things concerning “the community company”.

69 This concentration of power is an issue that some of the community members mentioned off-record as an occasionally problematic situation. In 2011, during the second research stay, the role of the community leader was assigned to another male community member who formed an active part in the occupation and the struggle for the *finca*.

by shareholders. Beyond this organization, the community itself hosts further democratically regulated groups as well. In 2011, the Alianza had a womens' committee (*comité de mujeres*), a group focusing on educational and school matters (*comité de educación*) and a general executive board (*junta directiva*) of representatives to discuss community issues.

To sum up, the community Nueva Alianza is a rather inaccessible and secluded space, organized as a collection of interrelated families. Almost the whole community is directly or indirectly involved in the business of the community-run company *Exportadora e importadora agricola e industrial Alianza S.A.* They are united by a shared story of suffering (see section 1.2) and the continued mission to pay back a loan to a bank by engaging in several projects that are democratically organized.

5.2. Accessing the Field

After having provided some general information about the community and its organization, I will now outline the story of how I accessed this community, was introduced to the community as a fieldwork area, and the opportunities, struggles and advantages of collecting data in a place like the Alianza. In anthropological endeavors, ethnographic fieldwork is both a central and a notoriously difficult topic (see for example Watson 1999; Robben & Sulka 2006; Okely 2012). The researcher collects data within a community and involves herself in the life-worlds of her participants:

“Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally” (Brewer, 2000, 10).

This has some implications for the way the data collection process is described, as the researcher herself is one of its main ‘tools’ for achieving a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the field and the relationships of the people living in it. The accounts presented in the following section have a rather subjective quality because they refer to my lived experiences in the field. First, however, they are *reflective* accounts of an ‘outsider’ in the community complementing the spoken data used in the analysis by elucidating their genesis and the situatedness of the researcher gathering them. Second, the observations and descriptions of relations in the field complement the spoken accounts of the consultants. Insights in the field and into the contexts of language production can support the

analysis in terms of relevancy, interpretation and situatedness of language practices (Deppermann, 2000).

Since learning about the struggles of the Mexican Zapatistas and the peak of their activities in 1994 during my Master's in Global Studies, I was interested in Latin American issues of land re-appropriation. I was especially intrigued by the intertwining of local, national and global networks of the struggling groups – mostly farmers in rural contexts and people from ethnic or indigenous minorities. Still engaged with my Master's thesis in the field of sociology, I wanted to approach this question ideally within a more closed community context. While outlining my rough ideas about a possible study of collective identity based on connections with other organizations in a rural Latin American context, a friend and fellow student of mine, Lucy Russell, suggested the community Nueva Alianza in Guatemala. She had visited it and told me about its unique history of land struggle, about their ethics of community, their connectedness in the realm of NGOs and other organizations, and about their accessibility. Their story and setting, as well as their apparent openness to visitors, seemed to be the perfect fit for my research. After contacting the community, I booked my flight and arrived in mid-June 2009.

I came to the Nueva Alianza with a loose idea based on what I already knew about the projects from the website and the information I had received from Lucy. Although geographically isolated, the different organizational committees of the Alianza made great efforts to join forces with local, national and global NGOs, university students, foreign volunteers and different types of unions and engineering programs. Their aim was to improve the status quo in organic and fair trade production and gain expertise and money for the other projects. Hence, my first research question was whether the community inhabitants could relate to being part of an *imagined community* (Anderson, 1983) of globally organized farmers, despite the geographic isolation of the Nueva Alianza project. I interviewed community members from a balanced gender and age spectrum about the relationships with cooperating organizations, and observed the interactions of community members with outside experts during my two-months stay.

Setting boundaries to a field in many fieldwork endeavors is not a trivial task, as it combines “relations, sites, events, actors, agents and experiences from which, and onto which, anthropologists try to impose some kind of conceptual order” (Shore, 1999, 45). Doing research in a community of the size and organization of a small village makes this a little easier, as the actual space in which things happen is somewhat predefined by geographical, social and political boundaries within which the agents themselves live and which they reproduce on a daily basis.

As outlined above, the community is very secluded and hard to reach. Nonetheless, by 2009 they were running a rather successful eco-tourism project. Thus, I was neither the first nor the last outsider entering the community, and my arrival did not cause much fuss. I found simple accommodation and a kitchen in the remodeled house of the former *patrono*. After my arrival, it took a couple of days until the community leader Javier appeared and introduced himself. He was in charge of distributing the chores for volunteers. I planned to be a volunteer helping with the projects while also conducting research. We concluded that I could be helpful to several projects, so during the first week I tried my hand at making handicrafts from bamboo, processing macadamia and helping in the potable water project. It turned out that I was best at scrubbing and refilling big water bottles in the water plant. Those bottles were sold to adjacent communities in the mountains and the city of Retalhuleu. Free bottles were provided for each community household on a weekly basis. During the meeting with Javier, I also asked him for an interview which we conducted a day later. As I did not have any first-hand information about the community's history and organization at this point of the fieldwork, it was important for me to get some first insights. The interview with the community leader proved to be very helpful for understanding the story, and it also prepared me for the interviews with other community members.

Having been settled in and having a 'job' within the community, I gradually got to know more people from the Alianza. First of all, I was in daily contact with my workmates; second, I took more and more strolls through the neighborhood. The eco-hotel is located in the community center along with other common working areas: the office, the bamboo workshop, the coffee manufacture and the macadamia manufacture. During work and breaks I talked to people and started to get to know them, develop relationships and gain an insight into their lifeworld. Leaving the community's center, I accompanied those I got to know at work to their homes and met their families. I assisted in church services and the community meetings. It did not take long until I was invited to dinner, later on to a wedding, several other religious ceremonies at church or at peoples' homes, to birthdays, and other community events such as agricultural trainings. It is necessary to say that the invitations to private events were for the most part due to the women's initiatives. The community men did interact with me on a friendly basis during work and in the meetings where only few women assisted. However, the community women were the ones keeping me busy and involved during my free time, trying to let me take part in community events as best they could.

The community leader of the Nueva Alianza can be defined as the principal *gatekeeper* to the field (e.g. Brewer 2000, 23; O'Reilly 2009). He allowed me to

come to the community with the prospect of doing research, and he introduced my intentions to the people in one of the community meetings. I told the representatives of the families that I was interested in the history of the Nueva Alianza and 'how things work' today. During our meeting, the community accepted my position as a researcher and consented to my observations. The actual engagement with the Alianza inhabitants came through careful fostering of personal relationships between myself and community members. As my stay was planned for roughly two months, I was not in a rush to ask for interviews too quickly, but had time to observe what was actually going on at the site of research – how people interact, what they talk about, and what the issues of daily life are. This is the first advantage of having ample time for fieldwork.⁷⁰ Second, I was able to make myself known amongst the community, show my engagement in community issues through working in one of the projects, and hence hoped to be rewarded with a different status than that of a tourist staying only for a couple of days. I started asking people for interviews after three weeks. My weeks of fieldwork were spent doing work in the water plant, and later at the macadamia processing plant in the mornings, with community events and interviews being conducted in the evenings.

Overall, accessing the field of the community Nueva Alianza was a process without any evident opposition from the inhabitants. My presence did not seem to bother the community members, although of course those people who were not interested in me and my endeavors simply would not initiate interactions. The ongoing influx of tourists from all over the world could be one explanation for the openness of the Alianza people. The community income depends to a large degree on the eco-tourism project and a constant flux of visitors exploring the community, guided and unguided. Like other tourists, I paid for my accommodation in the eco-hotel, although at a reduced rate in exchange for my volunteer work. However, my position in the community went beyond that of an average tourist. Through my job, I participated in daily work practices. During the time spent in the community, I shared bonding experiences with them: birthdays (and, literally, *birth* days of newborn babies), commemorations of dead family members, and weddings. A memorable shared experience was an earthquake that hit the community during my first stay. Even though the community did not suffer much damage, the event was a topic of conversation in the weeks

70 I am well aware of the fact that from an ethnological perspective, four months of field work is *not* a long time. However, it was still enough time to pursue the data collection without pressure, and to get a feel for what was actually 'going on' in the lifeworlds of the participants.

to come, and I was able to participate in these as somebody who experienced the same earthquake in the same locality.

Regarding my research, the community leader openly supported me and my work in front of the assembly of *beneficiarios*. So, his word might additionally have made people feel inclined towards making me feel welcome and support my research.

I was not the only long-term visitor staying in the Alianza in summer 2009. The community was able to obtain a volunteer from the US-American Peace Corps program. Paul helped with community accounts and supported the eco-hotel staff in dealing with tourist relations – mostly by doing translation work. However, he was not around a lot during my stay because he had to attend several Peace Corps meetings and trainings at other sites. Even when he was in the community, he left me alone for the most part and did not really take much notice of me or my research.

While working on my Master's thesis back home, and with a thorough revision of the interview and ethnographic data collected in 2009, it was intriguing that certain categories emerged from the data that were used repeatedly by the interviewees: *lucha* ('struggle'), *tierra* ('land') and *aquí* ('here'). Every interview started with the same question about the transformation of the Alianza from the times when they still worked under the owner, to the open occupation and eventually issues of community administration. This episode from the community history can be recognized as a "phase(s) of extraordinary cohesion and moment(s) of intensely felt collective solidarity" (Brubaker, 2002, 168), and as an opportunity for the speakers to display their feelings of belonging in manifold linguistic ways. This will be spelled out in detail in section 7. Data focusing on the narrative of transformation and other language practices dug deeper into questions of belonging constructions within this community, which seemed to be at odds with the 'usual' belonging configurations in Guatemala defined primarily by language and ethnicity.

My second stay in the community lasted from August to September 2011. Being in the community did not require a settling-in period this time round as most of the people recognized and welcomed me again. So, I assisted in meetings and community events right from the start. Many things had changed. Some projects were no longer active, and the water bottling plant had been privatized. The community was in the process of dividing the land into pieces for every family. Other parts of land were for sale for those who could afford it. Three beneficiaries left the collective to sell their products individually, and some were no longer content with the leadership. All in all, the community did not appear

as united as they seemed to be in 2009. I started working in the macadamia processing plant, as this was the only communal project left at that time. I also started to give English lessons to the children at school twice a week. As during my previous visit, I was invited to church events, birthdays and commemorations, and gladly attended. Again, in my private time I spent a lot more time with the women of the Alianza than with the men. The men were mainly only present at the tourist sessions, and of course community meetings.

As before, the community had a Peace Corps volunteer during my second stay. This time, interaction with the volunteer Jen was more friendly and frequent, although she also had to attend meetings outside the community. One of these Peace Corps meetings, however, was held in the Alianza and I got to know more volunteers working on other rural projects in Guatemala. That was quite interesting, as it put my local community experiences into perspective. Members of other rural communities pre-dominantly used ethnic terms for their social identification. One weekend during my stay and after leaving the Alianza, I visited two other volunteers and the projects they were working on. The trip to the other communities supported my presumptions that the categories and relations of belonging in the Nueva Alianza are specific in the rural contexts of Guatemala because they are not bound to ethnicity, but rather to place, as will be discussed in chapter 6.

To conclude, access to the field during the second stay at the Alianza went smoothly and more quickly regarding interaction with the inhabitants, as the phase of getting to know each other was skipped. During the participant observation, I noticed a certain dissonance between the sense of unity presented to the outside world and what was actually going on in the community. As for data recording, the second stay also was much easier because I did not have to concern myself too much with making interview appointments and finding interview partners. During the second visit, the data collection was focused mainly on the narratives the community members presented to tourist groups, and on other non-scripted interactions within the community (see 5.4). The difficulty was finding out about the meetings and encounters within the Alianza. I tried to keep track of them by frequently asking the group members I worked with or the people working in the eco-hotel. However, if the members of the committees etc. did not want me to be present at a meeting, they simply did not tell me about it, which happened a few times. The meetings I was not told about involved mostly smaller groups discussing matters of different company-related projects.

5.3. The Researcher as an Outsider Participant

Ethnographic research involves the contradictory logic of forming relations with our consultants and getting absorbed in their lifeworlds while also recognizing that this connection might only be a temporary one, and that there is an uncertainty of the roles the researcher takes in this process: “As ethnographers, we aren’t watching lab rats run through mazes or observing processes in laboratories. We are real people, involving ourselves in the lives of other real people, with real consequences for all of us” (Kahn, 2011, 185). The term participant observation⁷¹ as a tool of ethnographic research already semantically entails these contradictions of trying to be part of something while still keeping a distance between the “observer” and the “observed subjects”. To shed light on these implications, in the following I will reflect on my role within the community during research, and identify the possible dilemmas of forming relationships between “observer” and “observed”.

As Atkinson & Hammersley (1994, 249) point out, “we cannot study the social world without being part of it”. We cannot try to understand how our informants make sense of themselves as a group bound to place without knowing the tiniest bit about their lifeworld(s), their social backgrounds, and the ways they interact with each other. This is why data gathered from participant observation processes is a necessary complement to the narratives and other forms of interactions within the community.

In most literature on ethnographic methods, native language proficiency of the researcher is emphasized as crucial for establishing relationships with the community and understanding their lifeworld(s) (e.g. Duranti, 1997, 46). In the Nueva Alianza, people speak a Guatemalan variety of Spanish marked by some local idioms, and particularly by a variation in addressing between *vos*, *tú* and *Usted* (‘you’ in different stages of pragmatic use and formality).⁷² As I had already lived in different Spanish speaking places (Oviedo, Spain and Buenos Aires, Argentina), I could communicate and understand the community members without any major problems. Sometimes they made fun of my ‘Spanish accent’ (interestingly, people in Spain are delighted about my ‘Latin American accent’), but apart from that language was never made relevant in the interactions with me. I felt a certain insecurity in the forms of addressing people, and observed how they addressed me: people of my age and older used *seño* (an abbreviation

71 Note that participant observation here is defined as one part of the research process and not as the hypernym for all kinds of research methods (for example different kinds of interviews) in the field (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, 1f.).

72 For in-depth reading on this phenomenon see Pinkerton (1986).

for *señorita*, ‘Miss’), or simply my first name in combination with *Usted*, the formal form of ‘you’. Younger members chose to address me by my first name, but also used *seño* in some occasions and mixed *Usted* and *tú* (the rather informal ‘you’) as pronouns. None of them used *vos* to address me. Usually, community members addressed each other with *vos* for close relatives and friends, and *Usted* for more distant relatives and strangers.⁷³ However, speakers sometimes broke this consistency in my observations: within the community group of adolescents, a friend was addressed using his first name and *vos*, and on other occasions, was addressed by his first name and *Usted*. Intuitively, I used the first name and *Usted* to address people roughly my age, and *tú* with community members younger than me. For people older than me, I adopted the practice of the younger ones, calling them by their first name in combination with the title *Don* and *Doña*. As my solution was never frowned upon or made an issue (at least not in my presence), I stuck to it during both stays in the Alianza. Even though I spoke Spanish on a competent level, linguistically (among other categories), I was still marked as an outsider, not only because of my accent, the forms of addressing and the lack of Guatemalan lexicon, but also because of lacking other local linguistic practices (Pennycook, 2010). For example, recurring gestures (Ladewig, 2014) accompanying speech which are culturally and locally coded, or other semiotic practices as a combination of whistling (*chiflar*) and clicking sounds to get someone’s attention or affirm something as heard. Specifically, while working in the coffee and macadamia fields, this practice is used to communicate across a broad space, but is also used to call children in crowded spaces.

There are several ways to categorize the role of the researcher in the researched community. In the distribution of ideal roles in participant observation from Gold (1958, 220) and Junker (1960), mine could best be described with the role of the “observer-as-participant”.⁷⁴ In an “observer-as-participant” context, the group is aware of the researchers intentions and the group knows that it is being observed. The researcher tries to get involved in the activities of the group to move closer to an insider perspective. Of course, I could only participate in some forms of social community life. Amongst them was my daily work in the water bottling plant, and later in macadamia processing and the weekly Sunday

73 Pinkerton (1986) observes a gendered gap in the use of *vos* and *tu*, with men using the former to address other familiar men, and women rather inclined to use *tú* for displaying familiarity with other men and women. However, these preferences based on sex of the speaker were not observable in the Alianza community.

74 The other roles a researcher can adopt in the field are “complete participant”, “participant-as-observer” or “complete observer” (Gold, 1958; Junker, 1960).

rides to the town of Retalhuleu for grocery shopping. Visiting various families casually or for special occasions was another opportunity for interacting with the Alianza members. Throughout the community trainings and the regular meetings, however, I tried to be an observer, making myself as “invisible” as possible. A researcher can, however, never hope to be a “blind spot in the scene” (Duranti, 1997, 101), and in some recording situations, my presence influenced speakers’ behaviour more overtly than covertly, for instance in negotiating categories of belonging with another outsider (see chapter 6). Sometimes I was not told about meetings in smaller groups or church services of the evangelical community within the Alianza (the latter possibly, because I participated first in the catholic service when I got to the field). This shows that no matter how open the group was towards my visit, they still had control over my access to their lifeworlds.

DeWalt & DeWalt (2002, 21) give another overview of the researchers’ activities in the field, drawing on a continuum of participation from Adler & Adler (1987) combined with membership roles of the researcher by Spradley (1980). In these terms, the type of my commitment with the community ranges from “passive participation” (purely observing from within the site) to “moderate participation” (observation and partial participation). Although in terms of Adler & Adler (1987), that would imply “peripheral membership”, and my identification “by members as insider” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002, 22) I cannot claim that kind of label. While participating in and observing parts of community life, I gained insights into what living there might feel like. During work and the time spent with them, I got to know some of their routines, problems, joys, and ways of communicating. However, I was very aware of the fact that I would never become a part (and certainly not an “insider”) of this community of practice. Sometimes, these insights lead to feelings of loneliness, and when things did not go as planned, for example when I discovered that the community members had not told me about a meeting or participants did not show up for an interview appointment, it led to a bit of despair. Jotting down fieldnotes (see section 5.4.5) helped during these instances as a tool of reflection, and supported my insights and those of many other anthropologists that these feelings are normal during ethnographic fieldwork.

Even though I would not be an insider of the group, I was still emotionally involved in their endeavors. I admired their project based on struggle, working and living “united”, and my assumptions were confirmed in the interviews during the first research stay, as they presented themselves as having a high sense of *groupness* (see analysis in chapter 7). However, already during the first stay, I got a more detailed picture of the community’s fragmentation through informal talks with group members. This sense of fragmentation was heightened during the

second research stay, when some families dropped out of the collective to work on their own and some projects were closed or privatized. The “union”-project partly failed in the two years between my two visits, and it led to disappointment, not only from within sections of the community, but also from my side. Emotions in fieldwork were also involved in other contexts.⁷⁵ When speakers told me about the times of transformation, it often involved very emotional responses. Some consultants started to cry when remembering the times of struggle and transformation, and sometimes the interview had to be paused. Remembering the times of abandonment by the *patrono*, and starvation, indigence and migration for some of the respondents was a painful process, and hence a very emotional topic to delve into during the interviews.⁷⁶

There is always something peculiar about interpersonal relationships between a researcher and her people of interest. The observer knows that she has to take into account any kind of interaction, even personal encounters “off the record”, because “everything [is] fieldwork” (Rabinow, 1977, 11) and might be useful to get a better understanding about the community. The observed might act in a more self-reflective or conscious manner around the researcher, altering practices or ways of speaking. This situation cannot entirely be solved, but can at least be alleviated by staying active in the community for the longest possible amount of time. As I have already pointed out, four months in the community is a very short time for fieldwork grounded in participant observation. As for the rather short research timeframe, which was due to financial and time restrictions, I tried to find other ways to make myself less “strange”, as I have already discussed in section 5.2. On the one hand, this showed that I cared about the community in terms of contributing to the workforce, and – at least in the English classes in school – some expertise. On the other hand, it detached me from the role of a pure observer to something more like a fellow human being interested in exchange and learning. Another strategy of relating is to emphasize specific

75 Within the interdisciplinary project led by Katja Liebal (Evolutionary Psychology), Oliver Lubrich (Literature Studies) and Thomas Stodulka (Social and Cultural Anthropology), the “Researcher’s Affects” in fieldwork and their repercussions on data collection and analysis are explored. This project abandons common perceptions about affects and emotions as compromising “objective” research, but tries to integrate them into research practices (for Social and Cultural Anthropology see Stodulka et al. 2019). Whereas this project focuses on the researcher as the emotional subject, Stodulka (2017) develops an approach centering on the emotions of the consultants.

76 Unsurprisingly, the “official” narratives for tourist groups are far less emotional than some of the narrative accounts within the interviews.

aspects of belonging of the researcher with specific sub-groups in the field. Rubin (2012, 307), in discussing her fieldwork in South Africa and India, points out that it makes sense to “share with my respondents aspects of myself that I thought would resonate with their own positions in order to construct ‘alliances’”. I was able to relate especially well to the women. With the adolescent population, I formed bonds based on experiences of growing up not too long ago.

Nevertheless, when going into the field, one has to be aware of the fact that no matter how hard you try to immerse and relate, you will never rid yourself of being perceived as an outsider and observer. Furthermore, even though it is not necessarily on the surface of everyday interaction, the people of the community may not forget that they are the “subjects” being observed. While this is very obvious in situations such as interviews, it is rather subtle while recording interactions in community events or historical narratives for tourists (who are, then, the “observing” audience). Nevertheless, this apparent allocation of roles is always present:

“However much one moves in the direction of participation, it is always the case that one is still both an outsider and an observer. That one is an outsider is incessantly apparent. [...] No matter how far ‘participation’ may push the anthropologist in the direction of Not-Otherness, the context is still ultimately dictated by ‘observation and externality’” (Rabinow, 1977, 79).

It adds to the oddness that two different life worlds encounter each other.⁷⁷ I was well aware of my status as a European middle class student who enjoyed a university education and, in the first place, could afford a plane ticket. In the community, I was asked several times how much I paid for my flight, and people were quite pleased when I told them I not only studied but also worked to be able to afford the trip. That is also why I considered working in the community Alianza so important: to show that I am able to do physical work alongside most of the community people. But even as I tried to not disclose too much information on living standards in Germany, during the second visit to the Nueva Alianza I was informed thrice about financial problems of families, with fairly clear appeals to me to help out. I always answered by explaining that I am a student without the financial means. This helped both parties not to feel that their face was threatened, and in turn preserved the friendly relationships we had established.

It remains to be said that only the engagement with the community over a longer timeframe, the established relations between the researcher and the

77 This would for example also apply to researchers from a Guatemalan urban background.

community members, and the subsequent access to various meetings and events within the community, served to *enable* the kind of corpus compilation which will be introduced in the following section. Ethnographically framed research allowed for the recording of language practices in which belonging is implicitly or explicitly made relevant by the speakers in varying community contexts. This extends to similar practices within different contexts (e.g. narrations in interviews and narrations as part of a guided tour for visitors), with the same speakers performing similar language practices in different contexts and belonging (co-)constructions with different interlocutors (the researcher, other outsiders, fellow community members).

5.4. The Corpus

The corpus I assembled during the two research stays in the community comprises a total of roughly 66.35 hours of recorded spoken interaction. These are divided into about 25 hours of recordings from group meetings and trainings within the community, 21.2 hours of spoken interaction between community members (in some occasions including myself), a total of about 13.9 hours of interview recordings, and finally 6.25 hours of narratives for, and interactions with tourists. After several careful reviews of this overwhelmingly large corpus I admittedly selected certain extracts and contexts for the analysis in this book, focusing on passages where language practices of belonging play a major role. In this section, I will outline situational contextual features concerning the different data types and reflect on some specifics of the data collection.

In section 5.4.1, narrative accounts performed by community members in interview contexts are introduced. In section 5.4.2 the selected narratives produced within community tours for visitors are put under scrutiny. Another data type are interactions of the community members with outsiders which are highlighted in section 5.4.3. The data of intra-communal interaction, mostly in the form of meetings of the members, is described in section 5.4.4. Finally, in section 5.4.5, I will briefly outline my practice of taking fieldnotes to complement the spoken data corpus with ethnographic accounts.

5.4.1. Narrative Accounts from Semi-structured Interviews

As described in section 5.2, semi-structured interviews were my method of choice to elicit information regarding feelings of belonging to a potential imagined global community (Vallentin, 2010) during the first research stay in 2009. Semi-structured interviews have been used extensively in sociology, anthropology,

linguistics and other disciplines to figure out consultants' subjective views on specific matters of interest (Briggs, 1986; Wengraf, 2001; Flick, 2007). It covers those topics the researcher considers important while leaving space for the participant to delve into issues she thinks are relevant. The interviews started with a question about experiences during the times of transformation and the impacts this transformation had on their personal lives, eliciting narratives from most participants. They proceeded with questions regarding the current organization of the community and its projects, as well as asking for information regarding collaboration with national and international NGOs.⁷⁸

Especially when already being in the field for a couple of weeks and having engaged in plenty of 'normal' interactions with the community people, it felt strange during some interview sessions for both the researcher and the participant to sit down at a specific time and place with a recording device between them, and initiate a rather "official conversation" led by a set of questions. Interviews are a form of scripted communication which can potentially be inappropriate in settings of fieldwork in that they could evoke a certain expectation from the consultants of how they "should" behave or how an interview normally proceeds (Briggs, 1986). The interview was not an unknown *Diskurstradition* (Koch, 1988, 1997; Kabatek, 2011) to some community members. The participants, who were very active in organizational matters of the community, were experienced interviewees and practiced in answering community-related questions. The collaborating NGOs, and for example the labeling organization (FLO), already conducted research with these members (most of them men) to decide about the Alianza's eligibility for certain projects or financial support. However, especially with some of the younger interviewees and the majority of the women who were not active participants in community projects, there was a certain insecurity when it came to the 'official appointment' of the interview and to interviewing practices. The official discursive tradition of an interview implies that two or more interlocutors engage in a conversation in a question-and-answer format (or, as was hoped, even narration). This can lead to some unease, as the interviewer is worried about asking good questions and the participants might be worried about giving the 'right' answers, even among the more 'experienced' respondents. Although I made sure to explain that there were no 'right' answers to my questions, and that I was interested in their experiences and views, some of the interviewees were worried with 'getting it right'. In a few cases – for instance with 17-year-old Patricia – therefore the interview turned into a sequence of

78 The questionnaire of the semi-structured interviews is available in the appendix.

questions answered with one short sentence or a shrug, and after further inquiries on my part with a simple “no” or “yes”.

This points to the usual character of interview interaction, which gives a lot of power to the interviewer in terms of determining the topics and stopping the participants when they ‘wander too far off’. Briggs (1986) emphasizes that conducting interviews in any research site, especially one with an unfamiliar historical and social background, means imposing a form of “communicative hegemony” (Briggs, 1986, 90) onto the participants. This can only be tackled with a certain sensitivity to the points raised by the interviewees, and by the inclusion of other topics that are not fixed in a certain set of questions. Because of this, community narratives and other encounters serve as additional data not set up by the researcher, but employing the community’s “native metacommunicative norms” (Briggs, 1986, 90).

There is another problem arising from the interview as a method of research: Language, and specifically language practices, can cause slight irritations in interview situations. I spoke Spanish at an adequate level and was able to communicate everything I wanted to; however, I was not competent in communicative practices or “conversational norms” (Briggs, 1986, 89) adequate to the community. To give an example: During fieldwork I noticed that short silences in communication are not considered a sincere problem when people talk to each other. People simply paused for up to 60 seconds within a turn (maybe to further think about it, maybe just to let the other person think about the just said) without any sign of discomfort from the fellow interlocutor, who also remained silent. After the pause, the speaker just resumed where she had left off. I come from a cultural environment where silence in talk can be considered awkward after a certain (rather short) amount of time, especially when not talking to a family member or close friend, where silence might be tolerated. Hence, when people fell silent during the interviews, I may not have endured it long enough to see whether they would just have elaborated on the question a little later. Thus, I may have behaved inadequately concerning this “conversational norm” in the community several times. I just moved on to another question or tried to elicit a more elaborated answer by digging into the topic (Flick, 2007, 223). This could lead to sometimes hesitant reactions of the participants, sometimes leading to no response at all.

Narrating is a highly reflexive practice, even more so when it is embedded in social situations with ‘outsiders’. Although the interviews during the first research stay were not primarily designed to follow a “narrative interview design” (Wengraf, 2001, chapter 6), the first question elicited a narrative about the community’s past under the old owner, the struggles when he left, and the eventual

success in buying the *finca* as a collective project. Many of the participants related to this part in an emotional way, as it is a story about migration, starvation and struggle. Especially the older interviewees experienced this themselves, being the protagonists of the struggle. The younger ones could not all relate to the question, but some of them repeated the ‘common community narrative’ as they had learned it from their elders.

The sampling of the interviews, and hence, the narrative accounts within this corpus as presented in table 1, is based on a purposeful selection, balancing gender and age of the respondents as well as possible.

Table 1: Sample of Narrative Accounts from Interviews

Age Cohort	Male	Female
15–21	4	2
22–35	6	6
36–50	5	5
51–70	2	3
Total	17	16
Narrative Accounts in Total		33

5.4.2. Narratives for Visitors

The narrative accounts as part of the semi-structured interviews have proven to be a form of data with analytical value for the achievement of belonging in the Alianza. This is why I chose to expand my narrative collection for the second inquiry within the community. Narratives performed in encounters with tourists form a crucial part of the corpus.⁷⁹ Telling the community story in these situations requires a different narrative competence than narrating the community story in an interview. The narrative is told repeatedly by those involved in community tourism in order to share it with tourists or other visitors who come

79 On the web page of the Alianza community, the sessions for visiting tourists, called *conferencias* ‘talks’ are described in the following way: “CONFERENCIA: Un miembro de la comunidad da una charla sobre la historia de lo que obligó a la comunidad a la lucha para obtener las tierras de cómo trabajaron arduamente durante cinco generaciones y una descripción de cómo está organizada la comunidad actualmente” (“Talk: A member of the community gives a talk about the history, which forced the community to struggle for obtaining the land(,) about how they worked arduously for five generations and a description about how the community is organized today’, translation RV), <http://www.comunidadnuevaalianza.org/turismo.html>, last accessed 10/2019.

to the community. Hence, they might use certain repeating patterns to structure their narrative. By contrast, narratives in the interviews are rather spontaneous accounts triggered by a question (see 7). In both cases, however, the stories are told to outsiders, and speakers address specific positions and categories which would not necessarily need to be expressed for the in-group.

The meetings with visiting groups would usually take place on the big porch of the eco-hotel, where one of the community representatives narrates the story of transformation and the current organization of the Alianza. Later on, there is question time for the tourists, followed by a walk through the community during which the different projects are introduced, and the macadamia and coffee processing explained on-site. In some cases, if the visitors do not speak Spanish, the community speakers' accounts are directly translated – by the Peace Corps Volunteers, members of the visiting groups with Spanish competence, or also by me during my two stays. I was able to record narrative accounts from the interviews with each of the speakers who are also presenting the story to the visiting groups, so that a comparison between the two contexts is feasible (see section 7.3).

5.4.3. Interactions with Outsiders

During the second research stay, data collection also focused on contexts in which community members speak with other outsiders apart from tourists. The community is enmeshed in a network of national and international organizations, and is visited frequently by experts and trainers from different professions. In 2011, various meetings and trainings took place in the Alianza: a first-aid course for the community members involved in health care, education on health and mosquitoes (with a round trip to the single houses identifying possible spots for mosquitoes to breed), a biblical reading among surrounding communities headed by the mayoress of the district, education on how to deal with snake bites, a meeting with a documentary film crew, and a stove project under the patronage of the Peace Corps in which volunteers and families collaboratively build stoves with clay and tiles. Most prominent for the construction of belonging is a course for the community women organized by a governmental agency for the empowerment of rural women, implemented by a 25-year-old trainer from the capital. In the analysis, I will focus on this training as a key instance of interaction with an outsider in which belonging is explicitly negotiated (see chapter 6). During the meetings and trainings, I was allowed to accompany the groups and sometimes even participate. How the researcher's participation shapes the negotiation of belonging categories is also part of the analysis in section 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5.

5.4.4. Community Interactions

The third type of additional data to the narrative accounts are community interactions. They contain recordings from meetings and discussions within the community that revolve around community issues. During these sessions, I kept myself in the background and did not actively interfere in interaction. The meetings have a rather organized character; usually, one member of the community who was assigned the role of chairperson on the matters to be discussed, managed the discussions among the group. Apart from sometimes rising chatter among different parties of the meeting, the discussions were conducted in an orderly fashion, mostly with one speaker at a time. The data selected for my analysis is one of the general assemblies. This is a specific assembly of all beneficiaries in which matters of belonging are discussed explicitly. After the withdrawal of three families from the community project, their motives and how to handle the situation within the community legally and socially were discussed. The exploration on regimes of belonging in excursus 8.2 will be based primarily on the contents of this interaction.

5.4.5. Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes are a form of data that I produced complementary to the corpus of spoken data. The tasks of the researcher in participant observation are not only to engage with a community, but also to make the experiences accessible to introspection and analysis later on. Thus, fieldnotes are an important reflexive tool in ethnographic research for retaining experiences (Emerson et al. 2001; Blommaert & Jie 2010, chapter 4; Kahn 2011). They were part of my data collection in the field since my very first day on site. The notes mostly took the form of a diary, describing what I did that day, who I encountered and talked to, and what appeared to be interesting, challenging or emotional. The notes also include comments on interviews or community meetings I considered as possibly valuable for later analysis. Finally, sketches of sites or speakers' spatial positions during recordings and unrecorded events complete the contents of my fieldnotes. As it would have seemed inappropriate if I would have made notes during interactions with people, I usually wrote down the current events in the evening after a day's work in my own room. The fieldnotes are certainly a very subjective and unstructured account of what I considered noteworthy during fieldwork: "As representations, fieldnote texts are inevitably *selective*" (Emerson et al., 2001, 353, emphasis in the original). First, they are selective because the notes only include events the researcher participates in. Second, the events which are included are seen in the light of the researchers interpretations. Taking the later

points as an advantage rather than an obstacle, fieldnotes are an indispensable *reflexive* tool:

“They still tell us a story about an epistemic process: the way in which we tried to make new information understandable for ourselves, using our own interpretive frames, concepts and categories, and gradually shifting into new frames, making connections between earlier and current events, finding our way in the local order of things” (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, 37).

The notes help reflexively channel emotions and first-hand impressions of things happening in the field – of reconstructing the researcher’s own process of knowledge acquisition. They are also crucial for plainly remembering certain situations and observations (especially for a multi-year process of “writing it down” in a book like this one). The fieldnotes from the two stays in 2009 and 2011 are not an official part of the spoken language corpus which I will analyze regarding emerging categories, positions and practices of belonging and the linguistic means establishing them. They are rather considered as an additional source of consultation – an account of ‘having been there’ when it comes to sustaining and enriching the analysis of belonging construction in the community (Deppermann, 2000; Moerman, 1988).

5.5. Data Transcription and Selection

The step between the presentation of a corpus and its analysis is often a matter of a few pages in a book. In the real research process, it is a time-consuming and demanding task. So, in the following I will reflect on the process that turned the conversations in the research site into the transcribed narratives and interactions.

As ground work for my endeavor on language use and belonging in the community, I already had a fully transcribed corpus of the interviews from 2009 on hand. Within the scope of my Master’s thesis, the transcriptions had been made in Word, and due to the exclusively topical interests at that time, without markings for features of orality like pauses, intonations, etc. After coming home from my second research stay, I started to transcribe the narratives in the interviews, the interactions in the women’s training, and the history sessions for tourists⁸⁰ in the *Partitur Editor* of EXMARaLDA (Schmidt & Wörner, 2009). The editor allows the alignment of audio sequences with the written transcription and easy integration of many speakers in one sequence. The open source EXMARaLDA

80 Thanks to Katja Carrillo Ugalde, Alberto de Pascual and Ruth Scherer for their help in processing parts of the transcriptions.

package also offers other programs for managing the corpus and metadata, or for running corpus-based inquiries on specific words or co-occurrences. For example, for the corpus-based analysis of the use of the local adverb *aquí* 'here' in the interviews (see section 8.1), I used the concordance analysis tool EXAKT to find all utterances of the word in their co-text.

The detail of transcription depends primarily on the research interest and purpose (Dittmar, 2004, 51), and also on temporal and/or economic resources. As my approach to belonging construction is an interactional and situated one, a transcription convention based on the "Basistranskript" ('basic transcript') from the "Gesprächsanalytische Transkriptionskonvention 2" (GAT2) transcription convention (Selting et al., 2009) is suitable. It accounts for, among others, pauses, prolongations or truncations, paralinguistic phenomena and basic prosodic annotation for salient phenomena in the recorded interactions.⁸¹ Speakers are presented with their changed names. The Spanish transcriptions are all translated into English with pauses taken from the original. Other linguistic phenomena are not marked in the English version, which primarily serves to ensure better comprehensibility of the content for all readers.

For the transcribed narratives, I produced work-in-progress electronic filing cards including metadata on the participant, the thematic and chronological structure of each story, salient interactive features, a mind-map of mentioned characters and groups, and finally, other noticeable features. The cards were a manageable tool to keep an overview over all narratives and a good basis for the more fine-grained analysis of the narrative corpus.

Transcriptions are always "selektive Konstruktionen" ('selective constructions', Kowal & O'Connell 2008, 440). They are selective in three different ways: First, the transcription can never fully represent the primary data and transforms it from a single auditory event into a timeless visual product (cf. *ibid*). Second, the transcription is bound to the cognitive capabilities of the person listening to the recording and putting it into written form. Hence, what is heard and committed to paper is a rather subjective display of the researcher. I tried to ease the second effect by frequently putting parts of the transcriptions up for discussion to colleagues and peers in conferences, colloquia and data sessions. Furthermore, I consulted native Spanish speakers on the accuracy of my transcriptions. The third dimension of selectivity is the final representation of the transcribed data in the analysis. As the topic of belonging emerged from the data itself (in the very explicit negotiation of belonging outlined in chapter 6 followed by extensive

81 The transcription convention applied to my data in this book can be found on page xiii.

readings of the community narratives), it deserves a pivotal place in this book. However, of course not all of the participants can be represented with their voice and story in full length. Still, I try to integrate as many as possible to underline my analytical results and the variety of ways in which the community members tell their collective story. Some of the narratives will be presented in their full length even though the transcription and its translation span over multiple pages. It might seem inconvenient for readability at first blush, but the ample representation of the data is important in terms of transparency of the analytical process, and for the comprehension of the sequential unfolding of positions and categories. The assemblage of narratives across participants of different gender and age bolsters a broad picture of the narrative practice in the community.

As for the other interactions that form part of the analysis in this book, I chose those extracts which are most relevant to the question of belonging. For example, in the interaction of community women with an outsider, the sequences focusing on (ethnic) belonging are crucial, and therefore reproduced in detail and at length in their chronological unfolding. Parts of the same interaction, where the topic of conversation focuses for instance on financial means or landownership, are not considered. All in all, it is an objective of this book to present the emic perspectives of the participants in their full complexity and range, and hence, to make the data accessible and readable.