

### "Revenge" as Affective Assemblages? Emotions, Narratives and Social Relationships from Ethnographic Perspectives

Bolz, Manuel

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# ›REVENGE‹ AS AFFECTIVE ASSEMBLAGES? EMOTIONS, NARRATIVES AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS FROM ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES

Manuel Bolz

## *Introduction: Affects and assemblages*

This article deals with the social and cultural phenomenon of revenge from the perspective of contemporary empirical cultural research.<sup>1</sup> Using the concept of assemblage, I trace the manifold interconnections of the emotional states of everyday actors, their narratives of revenge in which they articulate knowledge networks with social relationships with friends, family members or work colleagues and their specific revenge stories.<sup>2</sup> The focus of my cultural analytical approach is on the interpretation of the affective qualities of these actors and narratives – on what they themselves call ›revenge‹. In doing so, I examine how (popular) images and ideas travel across stories and discourses of revenge and how they are assembled into a specific meaning. Stories of revenge therefore produce a network with specific forms of relationships between these actors – a social formation that can be called an affective assemblage. Furthermore, I am looking at the emotional expressions and affective transformations in the context of revenge and how the actors understand these as eurocentric forms of anger, grief, shame, guilt, pride, satisfaction, trust or hate.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to psychological or ethnological concepts, I use revenge not as an ahistorical or natural concept to classify the actors' interpretations of themselves and others or to strengthen the thought of an anthropological constant<sup>4</sup>, nor do I want to use revenge as a psychological reading to explain scientific processes (e.g. biological/neuroscientific knowledge or ideas of affect regulation/compensation) in the bodies of my interlocutors or even

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- 1 This paper is based on ethnographic research for my master thesis in 2020 and 2021 at the Institute for Anthropological Studies in Culture and History, University of Hamburg, with the name »Telling revenge. An ethnographic study of biographical revenge stories and crisis narratives as a communicative emotional practice«.
  - 2 The original idea of the assemblage concept developed from Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, MI (USA) 1987. See also the introduction to this volume.
  - 3 Cf. *Teresa Brennan: The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca, NY (USA) 2004 and *Ian Burkett: Emotions and Social Relations*. London 2014.
  - 4 Cf. *Fabian Bernhardt: Was ist Rache? Versuch einer systematischen Bestimmung*. In: Martin Baisch/ Evamaria Freienhofer/Eva Lieberich (eds.): *Rache – Zorn – Neid. Zur Faszination negativer Emotionen in der Kultur und Literatur des Mittelalters*. Göttingen 2014, S. 49–71.

predict their behavior.<sup>5</sup> Rather, revenge is used as an explanatory pattern by the actors themselves in order to interpret the practices of actors by means of narrative. In my empirical material, it becomes clear how this pattern is also used to order and justify biographical breaks and irritations in one's own biography as well as those of other participants in the revenge stories.<sup>6</sup> Revenge can thus be interpreted as both everyday and extraordinary, and it varies in its forms of expression and effects. There is not only one universal theory of revenge but rather there are psychological, philosophical, religious, jurisprudential, historical and sociological perspectives.<sup>7</sup> What most of the social theoretical approaches have in common, however, is the consideration that revenge is a reaction to a wrong or injustice suffered, in short: a cultural practice.<sup>8</sup> Revenge can be understood as an emotional practice, both performed and imagined. In everyday life, these forms are often called revengeful thoughts, desires or fantasies that are embedded in stories and the practice of storytelling. Revenge can therefore be read as a communicative emotion practice.<sup>9</sup>

In the past, scientific studies have often read revenge as negative and destructive. Cultural anthropology takes a reflective approach by not imputing deficits towards the actors. This is why I will show how revenge can also be attributed with ordering, (re)activating and productive forces. In order to create a differentiated picture of revenge as an affective assemblage, my paper pursues the following research questions: How can the phenomenon of revenge be understood as an affective assemblage? What elements and (social) networks of relations can I identify in the narratives? What is the empirical cultural scientific and ethnographic value of the cultural analysis of revenge from the perspective of affective assemblages?

Before introducing what an assemblage can be and how it can serve to understand the social and cultural dimensions of the world, I would like to briefly reflect on the research field of the ethnography of emotions and affects as well as my research design.

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- 5 Cf. Karin Tritt: Emotionen und ihre soziale Konstruktion. Vorarbeiten zu einem wissenssoziologischen, handlungstheoretischen Zugang zu Emotionen. Bern 1992.
  - 6 Cf. Daniel Bertaux: Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences. Bev. Hills, Cal. 1981.
  - 7 Cf. Nico H. Frijda: The Lex Talionis. On Vengeance. In: Stephanie H. M. van Goozen/Joseph A. Sergeant/ Nanne E. Van de Poll (eds.): Emotions: Essays on Emotion Theory. 1994. Mahwah, NJ (USA) 1994, p. 263–289 and Susan D. Boon/Stephen M. Yoshimura: Revenge as a Social Interaction: Merging Social Psychological and Interpersonal Communication Approaches to the Study of Vengeful Behavior. In: Social and Personality Psychology Compass 14/9 (2020), p. 1–13.
  - 8 Cf. Hilge Landweer: Ist Sich-gemüdig-Fühlen ein Rechtsgefühl? In: Hilge Landweer/Dirk Koppelberg (eds.): Recht und Emotionen I. Verkannte Zusammenhänge. Freiburg et al. 2016, p. 103–135.
  - 9 Cf. Monique Scheer: Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion. In: History and Theory 51/2 (2012), p. 193–220.

## *The ethnography of emotions and affects*

Particularly since the »emotional turn«<sup>10</sup> in the humanities in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the important role of emotions and affects in constructing the social and cultural dimension of everyday life and of human beings has been emphasized. Current theoretical and historical studies on emotion as well as affective studies constitute an interdisciplinary area of research and have produced several critical case studies on intercultural understandings of anger, shame, love, hate, grief, happiness and others. In this endeavour, the idea of emotions and affects as natural, universal, and ahistorical has come under scrutiny, and it has been pointed out that such concepts are highly eurocentric and have a strong bias towards the West.<sup>11</sup>

The ethnography of emotions and affects within empirical cultural research distinguishes between two methods and ways of working: doing research *about* emotions and affects and doing research *with* emotions and affects.<sup>12</sup> Especially the latter also connects with the field of sensory anthropology.<sup>13</sup> In this contribution, I focus on research about emotions and affects using the theory and method of assemblage around narratives of revenge and social relationships. In doing so, it is important to distinguish between affects, feelings and emotions and not to treat them synonymously. While feelings can describe biological-social processes and states within bodies and minds, emotions include their corporal expressions in form of processes and ges-

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- 10 For a broad overview cf. *Catherine Lutz, C./Geoffrey M. White: The Anthropology of Emotions*. In: *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986), p. 405–436; *Catherine Lutz: Emotions, Thought, and Estrangement: Emotions as a Cultural Category*. In: *Cultural Anthropology* 15 (1986), p. 287–309; *Dewight R. Middleton: Emotional Style: The Cultural Ordering of Emotion*. In: *Ethos* 17 (1989), p. 187–201; *Sarah Ahmed: The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh 2004; *Kay Milton/Maruska Svasek* (eds.): *Mixed Emotions. Anthropological Studies of Feeling*. Oxford 2005 and *Matthias Beitz/Ingo Schneider* (eds.): *Emotional Turn?! Europäisch ethnologische Zugänge zu Gefühlen & Gefühlswelten*. Beiträge der 27. Österreichischen Volkskundetagung in Dornbirn vom 29. Mai – 1. Juni 2013. Wien 2016.
- 11 Cf. *Ute Frevert: Geschichte der Gefühle*. Göttingen 2009 and *Benno Gammerl/Philipp Nielsen/Margrit Pernau, M.* (eds.): *Encounters with Emotions: Negotiating Cultural Differences since Early Modernity*. New York 2019.
- 12 Cf. *Sherryl Kleinmann: Emotions and Fieldwork*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina (USA) 1993; *Andrew Beatty: Emotions in the Field: What Are We Talking about?* In: *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11 (2005), p. 17–37 and *James Davies/Dimitrina Spencer* (eds.): *Emotions in the Field: The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork*. Stanford 2010.
- 13 Cf. *Constance Classen: Worlds of Sense Exploring the Senses in History and across Cultures*. London 1993; *Lydia Maria Arantes/Elisa Rieger* (eds.): *Ethnographien der Sinne: Wahrnehmung und Methode in empirisch-kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschungen*. Bielefeld 2014; *Sarah Pink: Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London et al. 2015 and *Karl Braun/Claus-Marco Dieterich/Thomas Hengartner/Bernhard Tschofen* (eds.): *Kulturen der Sinne: Zugänge zur Sensualität der sozialen Welt*. Würzburg 2017.

tures. These are socially and culturally coded. Affect refers to the time of (re) action, i.e., the temporal sequence and the intensity of actions.<sup>14</sup>

In the context of revenge, it becomes clear how early ethnological research in the first half of the 20th century read revenge in groups outside Europe as ›primitive‹, ›barbaric‹, and ›backward in terms of civilization‹.<sup>15</sup> Revenge was exaggerated here as a social diagnosis (so called ›revenge societies‹). In the logic of ethnologists and anthropologists at the time, practices of revenge would occur and become effective collectively instead of a central monopoly on violence to order society. Revenge was a form of exercising rights, even though it was often constructed as the opposite. Furthermore, researchers assumed that these groups would soon discard their forms of revenge and adopt the western legal system with its institutions, laws, and processes. Other ethnological theories of revenge understand the phenomenon as a reverse gift exchange.<sup>16</sup>

Having introduced the research area of the ethnography of emotions and affects, I would now like to briefly outline the assemblage concept and the characteristic of affective assemblages.

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14 Cf. *Patricia Ticineto Clough/Jean Halley* (eds.): *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham 2007; *Melissa Gregg/Gregory Seigworth* (eds.): *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham (UK) 2010; *Margaret Wetherell*: *Affect and Emotion. A New Social Science Understanding*. London 2012. For the concept of emotional agency cf. *Ruth Leys*: *The Turn to Affect: A Critique*. In: *A Critical Inquiry* 37/3 (2011), p. 434–472; *Don Weenink/Gert Spaargaren*: *Emotional Agency Navigates a World of Practices*. In: *Don Weenink/Gert Spaargaren/Machiel Lamers* (eds.): *Practice Theory and Research: Exploring the Dynamics of Social Life*. London 2016, p. 60–84.

15 Cf. *Rafael Karsten*: *Blood Revenge, War and Victory Feasts among the Jibaro Indians of Eastern Ecuador*. Washington (USA) 1923; *Christopher Robert Hallpike*: *Bloodshed and Vengeance in the Papuan Mountains: The Generation of Conflict in Tauade Society*. Oxford 1977; *Susan Jacoby*: *Wild Justice: The Evolution of Revenge*. New York (USA) 1983; *Rolf Kuschel*: *Vengeance Is Their Reply: Blood Feuds and Homocides on Bellona Island*. Kopenhagen 1988; *Lincoln Keiser*: *Friend by Day, Enemy by Night: Organized Vengeance in a Kohistani Community*. Belmont, Calif. (USA) 1991; *Sabine Klocker*: *There Should Be One Grave Opposite the Other: Blutrachepraxis bei den Beduinen in Nordalbanien*. Hamburg 1996; *Joseph Ginat*: *Blood Revenge: Family Honor, Mediation, and Outcasting*. Portland (USA) 1997; *Stephen Beckermann/Paul Valentine* (eds.): *Revenge in the Cultures of Lowland South America*. Gainesville, FL (USA) 2008; *Christopher R. Duncan*: *Violence and Vengeance: Religious Conflicts and Its Aftermath in Eastern Indonesia*. Ithaca (USA) 2013.

16 Cf. *Marcel Mauss*: *Die Gabe. Form und Funktion des Austauschs in archaischen Gesellschaften*. Frankfurt am Main 2009 (Original: 1925) and *Fabian Bernhardt*: *Rache: Über einen blinden Fleck der Moderne*. Berlin 2021.

*What are affective assemblages and how can these be made tangible and analyzable for cultural anthropology/ empirical cultural research?*

For the purposes of my research, I use the concept of assemblage to describe the social chaos in empirical realities.<sup>17</sup> It tries to order and structure it without formulating essentialist attributions.<sup>18</sup> Attempts at defining assemblage from the social and cultural sciences have produced a range of theoretical perspectives on discourses as supra-individual orders of knowledge and structures, practices as bodily-mental forms of doing as well as the material conditions of human being and action. In addition, a number of theorists have developed concepts such as ›Gefüge‹, constellations or actor-networks to relate actions of individual subjects and the environment at the micro-level to societies at the macro level, emphasizing the interactions and forms of communication between these constructed levels of the social.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the often dichotomous connections between local and global or social mobility/agency and the rigidity of structural conditions are broken up.<sup>20</sup>

Cultural and social scientists therefore understand the current perspective on research fields and their constructional character as open, symmetrical, multi-scalar and socio-material flows of energy which materialize and mediate in practices, discourses, things, processes and narratives.<sup>21</sup> In a network analysis, the focus lies on the multiple processes of translation that hold human and non-human actors together. In the concept of assemblage, which is based on the rhizome metaphor<sup>22</sup>, the focus is on the social relationships that produce the phenomenon *in situ*. In the form of these phenomena, they can be made visible and can be analyzed by researchers who are part of the assemblages they studying. Nevertheless, it is also important to highlight the limitations of the concept, because like the network metaphor, there is a danger here of being all-encompassing and universal. Does the concept attempt to explain the world and social orders from a general point of view or

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17 Cf. *Manuel De Landa: A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*. London 2006 and *Manuel De Landa: Assemblage Theory (Speculative Realism)*. Edinburgh 2016.

18 Cf. *Graham David Livesey: Assemblage*. In: Adrian Parr (ed.): *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Revised Edition. Edinburgh 2010, p. 18–19 and *Thomas Nail: What Is an Assemblage?* In: *SubStance* 46/1 (2017), p. 21–37.

19 Cf. *Bruno Latour: Reassembling the Social: Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford 2005 and *J. Law: Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie und materiale Semiotik*. In: Tobias Conradi/Heike Derwanz/Florian Muhle (eds.): *Strukturstehung durch Verflechtung. Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie(n) und Automatismen*. Paderborn 2013, p. 21–48.

20 Cf. *Martin Müller/Carolin Schurr: Assemblage Thinking and Actor-Network-Theory: Conjunctions, Disjunctions, Cross-Fertilisations*. In: *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41/3 (2016), p. 217–229.

21 Cf. *Sabine Hess/Maria Schwertl: Vom »Feld« zur »Assemblage«. Perspektiven europäisch-ethnologischer Methodenentwicklung – eine Hinleitung*. In: Sabine Hess/Maria Schwertl/Johannes Moser (eds.): *Europäisch-ethnologisches Forschen. Neue Methoden und Konzepte*. Berlin 2013, p. 13–37.

22 Cf. *Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guatarri: Rhizom*. Berlin: Merve Verlag 1976.

by using specific ethnographic case studies? As in any fieldwork, the field is constructed, i.e. the boundaries are artificially created, in order to make the research feasible and to be able to drill deep rather than formulate a broad superficial overview.

In the context of my ethnographic research on revenge, I am interested in the emotional and affective forces of human doing and being, especially in the desires, intentions and motivations of the everyday actors that hold the assemblage together.<sup>23</sup> In accordance with George Marcus' motto of following conflicts and metaphors, I trace the social connections and affective arrangements in the narratives of revenge.<sup>24</sup> I deliberately distinguish the concept of assemblage from the concept of network. In my reading, actor-networks describe the connections between human and non-human actors. However, describing these ties as four clearly distinguishable, successive phases creates a highly idealized and mechanical image which does not do justice to the complexity of social relations as it understands society as a system in which each position can be clearly labelled.<sup>25</sup>

Pierre Bourdieu already refers to the process of attraction and repulsion and the symbolic struggles and battles in his physical field model, which he transferred to social practices.<sup>26</sup> Even though it gives us a first understanding, it does not describe the social bondings between the heterogenous elements in detail, which are often conflict-ridden and negotiated. A focus on these provides information about the social in our everyday lives. Taking on the perspective of assemblages allows us not only to look at the relationships of these elements that are entered into but also specifically at those that are not, for any number of reasons. However, these forms of relationships need to be analyzed. The analysis of revenge produces insights about the social relations between individuals, their forms of communication and interaction, and the role of emotions and affects in everyday life.<sup>27</sup> In addition, we gain insight into experiences of violence and injustice, power hierarchies and gender orders.

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23 Cf. *Jane Bennett*: *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham (UK) 2010, p. 1–39 and 110–123; *I. Buchanan*: *Assemblage Theory and Its Discontents*. In: *Deleuze Studies* 9/3 (2015), p. 382–392 and *Francis Bangou/Monica Waterhouse/Douglas Fleming* (eds.): *Deterritorializing Language, Teaching, Learning, and Research. Deleuzo-Guattarian Perspectives on Second Language Education*. Leiden (NL) 2019, p. 110–132.

24 Cf. *George E. Marcus*: *Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography*. In: *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995), p. 95–117.

25 Cf. *Andréa Belliger/David J. Krieger*: *Einführung in die Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie*. In: *Andréa Belliger/David J. Krieger* (eds.): *ANThology: ein einführendes Handbuch zur Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie*. Bielefeld 2006, S. 13–51; *Bruno Latour*: *Über den Rückruf der ANT*. In: *Belliger/Krieger* 2006, p. 561–573.

26 Cf. *Pierre Bourdieu*: *Die Logik der Felder*. In: *Pierre Bourdieu/Loïc J. D. Wacquant* (eds.): *Reflexive Anthropologie*. Frankfurt am Main 1996.

27 Cf. *Robert Seyfert*: *Beyond Personal Feelings and Collective Emotions: Towards a Theory of Social Affect*. In: *Theory, Culture & Society* 29/6 (2012), p. 27–46.

The concept of affective assemblage refers to a specific reading of assemblage that focuses on the construction and shaping of emotions and affects in the social relations between human and non-human actors. Starting from these, I trace the various entanglements, potentials for action, and power relations. However, this does not happen successively but rather simultaneously so that all the elements of this form of relationship, in my case revenge, are considered equally. Exemplary studies have shown this in pedagogy and higher education, therapeutic culture, genomics and biology or in doing research with (digital) photographs.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, a number of studies have focused on the interconnections between affects and space.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, there is little mention of emotional assemblages in the research literature. Instead, they often mention emotional forces, agency and capacities which form affective assemblages.

This article aims to fill a gap in cultural anthropological research on revenge/empirical revenge research. In the following, after presenting my research design and empirical material, I focus on four narratives of revenge and their specific actor constellations, social relations, modes of construction and state of feelings: hero stories, success stories, stories of liberation and stories of vi-

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28 For a broad overview cf. *Dianne Mulcahy*: Affective Assemblages: Body Matters in the Pedagogic Practice of Contemporary School Classrooms. In: *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 20/1 (2012), p. 9–27; *Linda Henderson*: ›But What Wasn’t Enough‹: Exploring Affective Assemblages within a Professional Relationship. In: *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 38/4 (2017), p. 1–14; *Marjo Kolehmainen*: Affective Assemblages. Atmospheres and Therapeutic Knowledge Production in/through the Researcher-Body. In: *Suvi Salmenniemi/ Johanna Nurmi/Inna Perheentupa/Harvey Bergroth* (eds.): *Assembling Therapeutics*. London u.a. 2019, p. 43–58; *Mike Fortun*: What Toll Pursuit: Affective Assemblages in Genomics and Postgenomics. In: Sarah S. Richardson/Hallam Stevens (eds.): *Postgenomics: Perspectives on Biology after the Genome*. Durham (UK) 2015, p. 32–56; *Brigitte Hipfl/Elena Pilipet*: Digital Youth Assemblages. Affective Entanglements of Sharing (Anti-)Selves on Instagram. In: *Medienjournal* 44/22 (2020), S. 19–32; *Veronica Mitchell/Abdullah Bayat*: Affective Assemblages Matter in Socially just Pedagogies. In: *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning* 8/1 (2020), p. 57–80; *Louise Morley/Paul Roberts/Hiroshi Ota*: The Affective Assemblage of Internationalization in Japanese Higher Education. In: *Higher Education. The International Journal of Higher Education Research* 2020 and *Anna N. Wilson*: Learning to See with Deleuze: Understanding Affective Responses in Image-Viewer Research Assemblages. In: *Qualitative Research* (2020), p. 1–17.

29 Cf. *Ben Anderson*: Affective Atmospheres. In: *Emotion, Space and Society* 2 (2009), p. 77–81; *Jessica Ringrose*: Beyond Discourse? Using Deleuze and Guattari’s Schizoanalysis to Explore Affective Assemblages, Heterosexually Striated Space, and Lines off Light Online and at School. In: *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 43/6 (2011), p. 598–618; *Charlotte H. Kroløkke*: West Is Best: Affective Assemblages and Spanish Oöcytes. In: *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 21/1 (2014), p. 57–71; *Dominique Raby*: Calling through the Water Jar. Domestic Objects in Nahua Emotional Assemblages. In: *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 9/3 (2019), p. 529–544 and *Anna Carlina/Clare Gunby/Jamie Murray* (eds.): *Rape and the Criminal Trial. Reconceptualising the Courtroom as an Affective Assemblage*. London et al. 2020; *J. Willett*: *Affective Assemblages and Local Economies*. London 2021.



olence against objects.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, I discuss which affective assemblages are produced in talking about revenge, what they can look like and how they emerge, what motivates them, and what their limitations are. Finally, I discuss the role of ethnography and cultural empirical approaches in the study of affective assemblages. My argumentation ends with a methodological reflection on how to do ethnographic research on affects and emotions and to acknowledge their constructional character.

### *Research design: How to research revenge narratives?*

In early 2020, I put out a request on social media, namely Instagram and WhatsApp, asking for interview partners who have experienced, exercised or imagined revenge. Due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, I cancelled participant observations in court rooms – where revenge can occur – that I had originally planned as part of my fieldwork and instead conducted over 20 guided interviews and informal conversation. In addition, I evaluated advice literature, forum posts, and popular culture such as podcasts. My interviewees have diverse backgrounds and vary in gender, age, education level, occupation, ethnicity, and revenge practices, narratives, and imaginaries. However, I am not interested in social-structural characteristics, but rather in the different revenge narratives and the clusters/samples resulting from them.<sup>31</sup>

The revenge practices vary between distancing and breaking off contact, stopping care practices, destroying objects and property, gossip, telling lies and secrets, withholding knowledge and information and therefore producing disadvantages, showing one's success both professionally and personally, experiencing sexual violence, sexually cheating on one's partner or (secretly) writing with other people in a sexual and romantic sense, dating and meeting or having sex. The close relationships that were discussed in the revenge stories were partnerships, family constellations, friendships, colleagues and others. It is also important to include material objects in the research of revenge stories, e.g. phones, objects or specific spaces which played a key role in the narratives.

The interviews took place at my home, via video calls and phone calls, in cafes, parks and public places. Not only thematically, but also during the interviews, the emotional and affective codings of revenge became clear to me. For example, some interviewees spoke in a hushed voice as they talked about their enacted revenge, were agitated or angry as they recollected their

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30 Cf. *Christian Klein/Matás Martínez* (eds.): *Wirklichkeitserzählungen: Felder, Formen und Funktionen nicht-literarischen Erzählens*. Stuttgart 2009.

31 Cf. *Konrad Ehrlich* (ed.): *Erzählen im Alltag*. Frankfurt am Main 1980; *Ralf Bohnsack/Winfried Marotzki* (eds.): *Biographieforschung und Kulturanalyse: transdisziplinäre Zugänge qualitativer Forschung*. Opladen 1998 and *Thomas Hengartner/Albrecht Lehmann/Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber*: *Leben – erzählen: Beiträge zur Erzähl- und Biographieforschung*. Berlin 2005.

situations of revenge, or looked around curiously to see if other people were listening to their stories of revenge.

Using perspectives from narrative analysis and empirical subjectivation research, I trace the psychologizing, pathologizing, popular cultural and mass media knowledge of revenge.<sup>32</sup> Using grounded theory as my approach to the evaluation helped me to break up the empirical material and develop specific codes.<sup>33</sup> One thing became clear: Revenge appears mediated and often in the form of revenge stories, that is, a specific narrative form characterized by constructed forms of causality, chronology, and tension.

My research field therefore constructs itself from my interviewees' biographical and experiential narratives of revenge, that is, the verbally revenge stories in which they have experienced, practiced, or imagined revenge.<sup>34</sup> The tool of the guided interview was also used by my interviewees as a stage for the presentation of their own moral values, their own biography, but also of their desires and wishes, career and relationship ideas.<sup>35</sup> My point is not to judge the revenge stories as true or false. Rather, I would like to trace how revenge is used as a pattern of meaning and of interpretation in order to understand, rationalize, and justify biographical breaks in one's own life course and the behavior of actors in close social relationships.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, my analysis also reveals where actors take their revenge-knowledge from and which revenge discourses are dominant in their perceptions, lines of argumentation and strategies of positioning.<sup>37</sup> This interplay of discursive

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32 Cf. *Thomas Alkemeyer/Nikolaus Buschmann*: Praktiken der Subjektivierung – Subjektivierung der Praxis. In: Hilmar Schäfer (ed.): *Praxistheorie. Ein soziologisches Forschungsprogramm*. Bielefeld 2016, p. 115–137.

33 Cf. *Wendy Hollway/Tony Jefferson*: *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: Free Association, Narrative and the Interview Method*. London 2000; *Monika Götzö*: *Theoriebildung nach Grounded Theory*. In: Christine Bischoff/Karoline Oehme-Jüngling/Walter Leimgruber (eds.): *Methoden der Kulturanthropologie*. Bern 2014, p. 444–458.

34 Cf. *Silke Meyer*: Was heißt Erzählen? Die Narrationsanalyse als hermeneutische Methode der Europäischen Ethnologie. In: *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 110/2 (2014), p. 243–267 and *Silke Meyer*: *Narrativität*. In: Heimerdinger/ Tauschek 2020, p. 323–351.

35 Cf. *Michael Bamberg/Anna De Fina/Deborah Schiffrin* (eds.): *Selves and Identities in Narrative and Discourse*. Amsterdam 2007; *Wolfgang Kraus*: *Das erzählte Selbst: die narrative Konstruktion von Identität in der Spätmoderne*. Herbolzheim 2000 and *Dan P. McAdams/Ruthellen Josselson/Amia Lieblich* (eds.): *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative*. Washington 2006.

36 Cf. *Pierre Bourdieu*: *Verstehen*. In: ders. et al. (eds.): *Das Elend der Welt. Zeugnisse und Diagnosen alltäglichen Leidens an der Gesellschaft*. Konstanz 1997, p. 779–822.

37 Cf. *Rolf Wilhelm Brednich*: *Methoden der Erzählforschung*. In: *Albrecht Lehmann/Silke Göttsch* (eds.): *Methoden der Volkskunde: Positionen, Quellen, Arbeitsweisen der Europäischen Ethnologie*. Berlin 2007, p. 57–79; *Albrecht Lehmann*: *Erzählstruktur und Lebenslauf: autobiographische Untersuchungen*. Frankfurt am Main 1983; *Albrecht Lehmann*: *Zur Typisierung alltäglichen Erzählens*. In: *Thomas Jung/Stefan Müller-Doohm* (eds.): *»Wirklichkeit« im Deutungsprozess. Verstehen und Methoden in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften*. Frankfurt am Main 1993 and *Albrecht Lehmann*: *Reden über Erfahrung: kulturwissenschaftliche Bewusstseinsanalyse des Erzählens*. Berlin 2007.

negotiation of revenge and individual patterns of interpretation of revenge can be understood as a »discourse-practice formation« – a specific perspective that traces the connections between everyday practices and knowledge orders that are assembled in certain forms.<sup>38</sup>

But where does my research field of revenge begin, where does it end, and which assemblage can I identify? To approach this question, I must reflect the scope of my research and my role as a researcher and my limited resources (e.g., time, space, and money). I had to realize that there is not one but several definitions of revenge that coexist and are valid. What I found difficult was the fact that I had to put aside my own moral values and reflect on the revenge stories and the behavior of my interview partners. In addition, some practices are illegal even if they have not harmed people. Talking about one's own experience, thoughts and fantasies of revenge requires a certain degree of closeness, empathy and trust. At the same time, I had to keep a critical, analytical distance in order to understand the overall context. It is therefore necessary to conceive of myself as part of the affective assemblage, as I have a specific form of power to write down and represent the image of revenge and my interlocutors with their emotional states both during the research as well as in the process of writing. In addition, questions of research ethics and data protection are important here.<sup>39</sup> How do I anonymize the actors? How do I present the individual stories, and which case studies do I take out? Where do I store my empirical material, the images, screenshots and sound recordings, and who has access to them? What conclusions can be drawn from the data and the material, and could it be used to create a personality profile?

In the following I am presenting selected affective assemblages in the context of narratives of revenge and their form of satisfaction: moral values, happiness and pride, emancipation and strength and anger.<sup>40</sup>

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38 Cf. *Andreas Reckwitz*: Praktiken und ihre Affekte. In: H. Schäfer (ed.) 2016, p. 163–181; »Praktiken und Diskurse. Zur Logik von Praxis-/Diskursformationen« cf. *Andreas Reckwitz*: Kreativität und soziale Praxis. Studien zur Sozial- und Gesellschaftstheorie. Bielefeld 2016, p. 46–66 and *Rixta Wundrak*: Biografie als Praxis-Diskurs-Formationen. Eine praxeologische Perspektive auf lebensgeschichtliche Interviews. In: Ina Alber/Birgit Griese/Martina Schiebel (eds.): Biografieforschung als Praxis der Triangulation. Wiesbaden 2018, p. 83–104 and *Andreas Reckwitz*: Praktiken und Diskurse. Eine sozialtheoretische und methodologische Relation. In: Herbert Kalthoff/Stefan Hirschauer/Gesa Lindemann (eds.): Theoretische Empirie. Zur Relevanz qualitativer Forschung. Frankfurt am Main 2008, p. 188–209.

39 Cf. *Simone Bignalli*: Affective Assemblages: Ethics beyond Enjoyment. In: Simone Bignalli/Paul Patton (eds.): Deleuze and the Postcolonial. Edinburgh 2010, p. 78–102.

40 Cf. *Angela Keppler*: Beispiele in Gesprächen: Zu Form und Funktion exemplarischer Geschichten. In: Zeitschrift für Volkskunde (1988) 84, p. 39–57 and *JT Torres/Jill F. Crosby*: Timeless Knowledge, Embodied Memory. The Performance of Stories in Ethnographic Research. In: *Etnofoor Stories* (2018) 1/30, p. 41–56.

*Revenge relationships. Understanding narratives of revenge as affective assemblages*

In order to identify the heterogeneous elements of the selected case studies, I approach revenge as a specific narrative and performative construction that first articulates this assemblage.<sup>41</sup> The multiscality of the affective assemblage becomes clear when we look at the various levels of analysis that constitute the phenomenon of revenge: the actors, their affective bodies and their feelings, the narratives with their revenge practices, articulated social relations, their positions to discourses about revenge and me as the researcher.<sup>42</sup> I do not ask what revenge is or is not, but how it comes into the world and is constructed in the medium of a revenge story and a narrative.<sup>43</sup> The focus is therefore on the practices and processes of its production, on the performative character of affective assemblages<sup>44</sup> – in my case on the specific practices of storytelling and the revenge stories told. Through the four dimensions of hero stories, stories of success, stories of liberation and stories of violence against objects, it becomes clear how affects and emotions motivate and mobilize social actions.<sup>45</sup> Thus, revenge is formed by the conditions of its expression. Affective assemblages do not stand alone but are interwoven with moral assemblages<sup>46</sup> or narrative assemblages.

Is every revenge story an affective assemblage because it constitutes social relations? How does revenge connect actors with each other, even if the social relationship has become fragile or even broken? How can revenge be socially destructive, but at the same time acquire ordering, (re)activating and productive dimensions? In order to explore these questions, I will present selected revenge narratives below. Due to the limitations of this study, not all of my empirical material can be presented here. Rather, I would like to

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41 Cf. *Karin Bürkert*: Performativität. In: Heimerdinger/ Tauschek 2020, p. 351–380.

42 Cf. *Deborah Lupton*: Beyond the »Affect Heuristic«: The Emotion-Risk Assemblage. Conference Paper 2012; *Frederik Böhling*: The Field Note Assemblage: Researching the Bodily-Affective Dimensions of Drinking and Dancing Ethnographically. In: Britta Timm Knudsen/Carsten Stage (eds.): *Affective Methodologies. Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect*. London 2015, p. 161–178 and *Nick J. Fox/ Pam Alldred*: New Materialist Social Inquiry: Designs, Methods and the Research-Assemblage. In: *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 18/4 (2015), p. 399–414.

43 Cf. *Jack Katz*: *How Emotions Work*. Chicago 1999 and *Michael Feely*: *Assemblage Analysis: an Experimental New-Materialist Method for Analysing Narrative Data*. In: *Qualitative Research* 20/2 (2020), p. 174–193.

44 Cf. *Alun Jones/Julian Clark*: Performance, Emotions, and Diplomacy in the United Nations Assemblage in New York. In: *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 109/1 (2019), p. 1–17.

45 Cf. *Nick J. Fox*: Emotions, Affects and the Production of Social Life. In: *The British Journal of Sociology* 66/2 (2015), p. 301–318.

46 Cf. *Aihwa Ong/Stephen J. Collier*: *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*. Malden et al. 2005 and *C. Mattingly*: *Review: Moral Assemblages, Heroin Addicts, and Ethical Becoming*. In: *Current Anthropology* 55/3 (2014), p. 360–362.

develop a reading to order the various biographical revenge stories – experienced, exercised and imagined.

### *Hero stories: Staging moral values*

I call those revenge narratives ›hero stories‹ in which my interlocutors stage themselves as morally superior. The interview is thus used to articulate one's own moral superiority or to distance oneself from and reject revenge (no revenge stories). This happened with reference to religious upbringing, concepts of a spiritual cosmic balancing energy (often called ›karma‹) or because of revenge already experienced. What I also find worth mentioning is the fact that some interviewees told me that they had not yet talked to anyone about their revenge stories. In the interview, however, they often contradicted themselves or felt shame.<sup>47</sup> Thus, it often became apparent that they had already talked to partners, friends or family members about their experienced, practiced or imagined revenge.

For example my interviewee Luisa (26)<sup>48</sup> tells me about her religious upbringing and her strictly Catholic parents who told her about revenge stories in religious literature. Since then, she has associated revenge with negative connotations even though it is mentioned in the bible. In the interview she points to her education while mentioning that she rejects revenge. In the interview, she often refers to her harmony-seeking, moral and peace-loving character. In her interpretation of revenge, she sees the goal as feeling satisfaction and achieving great harm in the other person because of an injury one has suffered. She cannot identify with feeling negative or even hateful feelings towards another person. In her revenge story, it is clear how she strengthens and stabilizes the social relationship with her family, especially her parents, through the revenge story. In her reading, these have in turn influenced her moral education during her childhood, that is, the imagination and standardization of what is categorized as ›good‹ and ›bad‹ behavior.<sup>49</sup> This narrative is often reproduced in pop culture settings such as books or films.

### *Stories of success: Happiness and pride*

I call those revenge stories in which my interviewees talk about how working on themselves is a form of revenge ›success stories‹; for example, if a long-aspired goal such as graduating from university or emigrating to a faraway country has been successfully mastered. Although the opponent against whom the actors take revenge is constructed and clearly named, this person

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47 Cf. Sighard Neckel: Status und Scham. Zur symbolischen Reproduktion sozialer Ungleichheit. Frankfurt am Main u.a. 1991.

48 All names have been synonymized to comply with research ethics and research data management.

49 Cf. Interview with Luisa in 2020.

recedes into the background due to the valorization of one's own position and the reappraisal of biographical experiences. It becomes clear that there does not always have to be a subject or object of revenge.

In addition, the saying ›success is the best revenge‹ has already migrated into popular advice literature about revenge that I evaluated in the course of this research.<sup>50</sup> Cultural analytical readings of an entrepreneurial self also play a role here, in which one's feelings of anger, satisfaction, rage, or sadness are directed towards one's continuing education – a goal which, if one follows the logic of the argument, in the best case pays off economically in the end. Feelings such as happiness and pride are also relevant here. It also becomes clear from the success stories that revenge does not have a purely negative connotation but has developed its own ordering, activating and productive functions and effects.<sup>51</sup>

My interviewee Selina (28) tells me about her revenge story: About ten years ago, when she was living in Turkey, she got to know a Turkish man living in Switzerland via social media and fell in love with him. The only chance for her to move to Switzerland to be with him, she says, was to marry him. He and also his parents talked about how successful he was, that he had his own apartment and car, and that she would be comfortable. They married and she moved in with him in Switzerland. There, however, she realized that she had been lied to and that he had neither his own apartment, nor his own job, nor his own car. The religious family wanted her to be a housewife while he was going to work. Selina's wish, however, was to enrol in German studies. However, she was persuaded that as a non-native speaker of German, she would never study or be successful in this field, and certainly not as a woman. Towards me, she articulates a desire for revenge, to succeed in German studies. That is the reason why she filed for divorce and started a bachelor's and master's program in German studies in Turkey, spent several years in Germany through programs such as Erasmus or Freemover, and is now pursuing a doctorate in the subject. Here it becomes clear how the revenge story manifests the non-relationship with her ex-partner. In a humorous way, she mentions that she would have preferred to send her bachelor's and master's degrees to her ex-husband's house. Her revenge gives her motivation in moments of irritation or when she questions her studies and the doctoral project overall.<sup>52</sup>

Brigitte (48) shares with me that she is getting revenge on her ex-husband who cheated on her with the housekeeper twenty years younger than her.

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50 For example: *Senna Gammour*: In dein Gesicht!: Erfolg ist die beste Rache. Berlin 2021; *Reinhard Haller*: Rache: Gefangen zwischen Macht und Ohnmacht. Elsbethen 2021 and *Axel Muth*: MEINE Rache. Der ultimative Ratgeber zur Seelenbefriedigung und Genugtung. Münster 2021.

51 Cf. *Alfred Bellebaum*: Glücksvorstellungen. Ein Rückgriff in die Geschichte der Soziologie. Opladen 1997; *Sara Ahmed*: The Promise of Happiness. Edinburgh 2010 and *Richard Taylor*: Restoring Pride: The Lost Virtue of Our Age. Berkely, Calif. (USA) 1996.

52 Cf. Interview with Selina in 2020.

She does this by following her longstanding ambition to emigrate to Mallorca and renovate a finca there. Now, she lives there with her new boyfriend. The children, however, have to stay in Germany because she has lost custody. To me, she emphasizes how she keeps telling mutual friends how happy she is in the hope that they will tell him. Here it becomes clear how revenge stories also state a non-relationship here – sometimes a social relationship that ended. She also wants to show him how successful she is now as a real estate agent and regularly posts pictures and videos on Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp.<sup>53</sup>

### *Stories of liberation: strength, power and emancipation*

In these articulated stories of revenge, it becomes clear how frequently gender-connotated experiences of violence and injustice appear. Thus, actors in manipulative, controlling and so-called toxic relationships often take revenge by cheating on their partner sexually or romantically. After the act of revenge itself, a process of critical reflection about themselves, their partner, their relationship, and the shared future begins. In addition, the narrowness of possibilities for action that prevailed before the act of revenge is reflected upon and a portfolio of new and creative possibilities for action becomes clear. Separating from the partner is now one of many options. Here, an anthropological view could follow that emphasizes emancipation, independence and the detaching potential of revenge.<sup>54</sup>

My interviewee Isabell (25) shares how she got revenge on her grandfather. In Isabell's narration, it becomes clear how the revenge story defines family relationships. Her grandfather had psychologically terrorized, manipulated and controlled her, her mother and her grandmother. This is especially evident in the fact that Isabell's grandmother had to take care of the household and look after him intensively, even though she was seriously ill. When she died a few months ago, however, Isabell's grandfather was suddenly able to handle all the day-to-day matters himself. This irritated Isabell. She points to the disrespectful, sexist, misogynic and condescending behavior her grandfather exhibited towards her and her mother: For example, he deliberately forgot her name or addressed her incorrectly, favoring her brother who lives thousands of miles away in the United States, even though it was Isabell who helped him with everyday life, or touching her and her mother inappropriately, even when she was still a child. Currently, Isabell takes revenge on her grandfather by limiting her care-work in an emotional way: After the death of Isabell's grandmother, she supports him in the household, with personal

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53 Cf. Interview with Brigitte in 2020.

54 Cf. *Elizabeth Colson*: Competence and Incompetence in the Context of Independence. In: *Current Anthropology* 8/1–2 (1967), p. 92–111; *Paul Kockelman*: Agency: The Relation between Meaning, Power and Knowledge. In: *Current Anthropology* 48/3 (2007), p. 375–401 and the chapter »Power and Projects: Reflections on Agency« in *Sherry B. Ortner*: *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject*. Durham 2006, p. 129–155.

hygiene, with everyday shopping, dressing, washing clothes or cleaning the apartment. She refrains from all practices beyond that - the warm greetings and goodbyes, small attentions and gestures of familiar love. She wants to show him how alone he is, how he has no one around and therefore initiate a reflective process to evaluate one his own actions. Isabell does not know whether this is possible because of her grandfather's alcoholism. At the end of the interview Isabell also attributes her grandfather's behavior to his childhood abuse at the hands of his mother and therefore develops a psychological concept of interpretation.<sup>55</sup>

My interviewee Ronja (27) takes revenge on her former partner because he manipulated and terrorized her not physically, but verbally and emotionally. This story constructs a social relationship with her partner that was toxic from her point of view. He regularly told her how ugly she looked; that she should be happy to have a boyfriend and told her repeatedly that he could have many other women. This triggered deep crises in Ronja, and her self-confidence diminished. She no longer dared to leave the house and developed self-doubt that is still visible today as she said.

Her friends encouraged her to go to a club night, where her revenge act started. There she met a young man with whom she thought she could talk very well and who also seemed visually appealing to her. With him she began a secret affair, as she always emphasizes their specific social relationship to me. She cheated sexually on her steady partner without him knowing – and he still does not know because Ronja draws strength from the secret to this day. She shares with me that she often still notices the consequences of her toxic relationship today: in her dysfunctional relationship with men, with herself, her appearance and her body, or her behavior on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok. She attributes the problematic behavior of her former boyfriend to having a bad relationship with his parents and having been abused as a child.<sup>56</sup>

My interviewee Vanessa (26) tells me about how she got revenge on her former long-term partner. He had cheated on her with another girl who lived outside Germany. This revenge story creates a social relationship between her, her former partner and his temporary girlfriend. Even though Vanessa became skeptical about his excessive cell phone use, it took a while for her suspicions to become confirmed. One day they were drinking together in Vanessa's dorm room. When her boyfriend fell asleep, she took his cell phone and unlocked it because she knew the code. When she saw the messages from her partner with the girl, she knew he was cheating on her. She went to sleep. The next morning, she was very dismissive to her partner. When he noticed this and spoke to her about it, an argument ensued. Vanessa expressed to him the condition that he should call his mistress now and confess to her that he had a girlfriend. He wanted to resist, but Vanessa

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55 Cf. Interview with Isabell in 2020.

56 Cf. Interview with Ronja in 2020.



prevailed, and she forced him to call his mistress. The girl was surprised and shocked and quickly hung up after saying: This relationship is over. And even though the relationship with Vanessa did not last after the incident, she calls her action an act of revenge that gives her satisfaction.<sup>57</sup>

In the interview with Niklas (23), my interviewee tells me about sexualized experiences of violence. Before the interview, he did not tell me what he wanted to talk about. Interestingly, I was also able to interview his mother Helena (55). This allowed me to include two specific perspectives on sexualized violence. Niklas tells me about a summer evening in Hamburg that he spent with friends. When they left and he remained sitting in a pub for a while, he was approached by a young man. They communicated and exchanged numbers with each other. This developed into a friendship and regular meetings. However, the young man increasingly developed a problematic and controlling behavior, as Niklas tells me. He called him every day and disturbed him with text messages. It even went so far that he threatened Niklas and his family. One evening he met with him, under pressure from the young man, and some form of sexual violence occurred.<sup>58</sup> After experiencing this violence, he told his close friends and family about it. While his friends and his mother showed understanding, his father and his two brothers reacted inappropriately. They did not take the situation seriously. Niklas suspects that it was because it was a man-man constellation. Here, revenge serves as a relational element between Niklas, his mother, his rapist, and actors of the law enforcement.

Niklas and his mother went to the police and initiated a legal process. Here, too, he feels he was not taken seriously because of the man-man constellation, so that police and legal processes were delayed or stalled. Niklas was in a very bad state after the crime. He interrupted his studies and went into inpatient psychiatric treatment due to anxiety as he told me. He describes himself as someone who thinks many things through before acting, so thoughts of revenge seemed irrational and a knee-jerk reaction to him. He tried to interpret the background of the young man from a psychological point of view in order to understand and justify his action, the act of sexualized violence, and also to make it plausible in his perception.<sup>59</sup>

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57 Cf. Interview with Vanessa in 2020. At this point, the question may be raised how the selection of this interview reproduces the stereotype and the social figure of the ›jealous girlfriend‹. Further research could be done on who can and cannot talk about such forms of revenge and how this form of revenge story also often receives a gender coding.

58 Cf. *Bärbel Grubner*: Sexualisierte Gewalt. Feministisch-anthropologische Überlegungen zur »neuen Gewaltsoziologie«. In: *Austrian Studies in Social Anthropology* 2 (2005), p. 1–31 and *Patricia Zuckerhut*: Von der Gewaltdebatte in Anthropologie und Sozialwissenschaften hin zu einer feministischen Analyse geschlechtlich konnotierter Gewalt. In: *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie (ZfE)* 135/2 (2010), p. 275–304.

59 Cf. *Andreas Fahrmeir*: Rechtfertigungsnarrative: zur Begründung normativer Ordnung durch Erzählungen. Frankfurt am Main 2013.

His mother, on the other hand, wanted to take vigilante justice and revenge, as she tells me. Her revenge was motivated by the fact that she was disappointed with the German judicial and legal system and the authorities and therefore wanted to take it into her own hands to make up for the injustice and violence she and her son suffered. She was particularly disappointed by the fact that this violent and delinquent actor was already known to the police and that he also perpetrated sexualized violence against men on two other occasions. They also reported him to the police. He worked in a local bakery illegally and secretly lived in the basement. Here, too, Helena encountered incomprehension from the police. She did not blame her son because such violent actors are unpredictable and such situation is not foreseeable. She wanted to track down the man and kill him because she felt such hatred. She even drove down the street and the residential area where he seemed to live.<sup>60</sup>

### *Stories of violence against or with things: Anger, aggression and disruptive forces*

This dimension looks at those revenge stories in which anger-driven violence against objects are replacing a violence against people, e.g., in an emotional, physical, psychological, or symbolic manner.<sup>61</sup>

For example, my interviewee Merve (23) talks about how she threw her roommate's toothbrush down the toilet and then put it back in the cabinet. In conversation, she is ashamed of her act of revenge, but emphasizes that she acted impulsively and situationally. Now, in retrospect, she reflects that there could have been other ways of negotiating. However, communication with her former roommate was very difficult.<sup>62</sup> In another interview, Brigitte (48) (who we got to know earlier) tells me that she destroyed the bed she shared with her former husband with an axe. The reason was the hurt she suffered because her former husband cheated on her with the much younger nanny. Brigitte caught the two in their bed when she came home one day. A divorce followed, disputes over their shared house in Hamburg and alimony payments, as well as a drawn-out court case over custody of their two shared children. The marriage bed can be interpreted both physically and symbolically as a space of intimacy, togetherness, trust and security. Brigitte's former husband has symbolically destroyed this through his cheating, and Brigitte does this in her act of revenge on the physical level.<sup>63</sup> From these two ex-

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60 Cf. Interview with Niklas and Helena in 2020.

61 Cf. *Johannes F. Lehmann*: Im Abgrund der Wut. Zur Kultur- und Literaturgeschichte des Zorns. Freiburg i. Br. 2012 and *Jürgen Brokoff/Robert Walter-Jochum* (eds.): Hass/Literatur. Literatur- und kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zu einer Theorie- und Diskursgeschichte. Bielefeld 2019.

62 Cf. Interview with Merve in 2020.

63 Cf. Interview with Brigitte in 2020.

amples, it becomes clear that objects like a toothbrush or a bed can enter an element in the social relationship with a roommate or a spouse.

*Assemblage-thinking and doing revenge or: What role does ethnography have in the assemblage concept?*

I have tried to show how affective assemblages manifest themselves through different narratives of revenge and become accessible for ethnographic research. The assemblage concept can provide a fruitful analytical perspective for empirical cultural research in the 21st century, especially the multiple reciprocal relations between actors, their emotional and affective states, their practices, and narratives.

For me, ethnography means a critical analysis of social realities, practices and processes at the micro level, but not without taking into account questions of society as a whole. In order to do justice to the complexity of social realities, empirical cultural research works with qualitative methods. Methods such as grounded theory are used to systematically break down the empirical material and to argue – inductively – from the material, of course not without mentioning the historical context. Cultural theoretical perspectives are used to interpret the material. Ethnography therefore means developing a specific reading of the social and cultural dimensions of the human. Prominent research approaches are the view on the level of discourse, the level of practice or the level of the material. This is where the assemblage concept comes in, which, as I have made clear, goes beyond the network character of social relations. Assemblage is not a method for me, since I do not generate empirical material through it, nor is it a methodology, because it is not a procedure of analysis or evaluation.<sup>64</sup> It is a social and cultural theoretical concept that on the one hand guides the construction of the research field and conceives it as seemingly limitless, with its boundaries drawn only by the researcher and their material. The multiple influences on the research field – local and global flows of people, goods, knowledge, ideas, things, or more – are only revealed through the description and analysis of a specific phenomenon. On the other hand, it can also be used as a lense to interpret the material in terms of content. Here, however, it is sometimes difficult to use highly abstract and often philosophical terms.

In further ethnographic microstudies, the analytical categories of the concept should be theoretically elaborated, formulated and operationalized for a cultural analysis. Many papers have reflected on the epistemic and ontological status of the concept. Further questions to ask include how the assemblage concept can be connected with methods such as participant observation, interviews, analysis of historical sources, documents, or photographs.

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64 Cf. *Jae Eon Yu*: The Use of Deleuze's Theory of Assemblage for Process-Oriented Methodology. In: *Historical Social Research* 38/2/144 (2013), p. 197–217; *Rebecca Coleman/Jessica Ringrose* (eds.): *Deleuze and Research Methodologies*. Edinburgh 2013 and *Ian Buchanan*: *Assemblage Theory and Method. An Introduction and Guide*. London 2021.

This also raises questions about the production and representation of knowledge: How can assemblages be visualized? How can such concepts be made accessible to publics outside the realms of science, politics or economics? What new, previously unheard understanding of the world and knowledge can be strengthened by the assemblage concept?

In my opinion, the concept could help to develop a productive and flexible ethnographic practice, which according to Michi Knecht includes three criteria which are also covered by the assemblage concept: Making the knowledge visible in the research fields, adding an analytical layer to the knowledge and playing it back to the participants, and further developing the practice of ethnographic research.<sup>65</sup> It is also necessary to evaluate which research fields may be more suitable than others. The field of emotions and affects offers valuable starting points for further connections and discussions.



Manuel Bolz, B.A.  
University of Hamburg  
Institute for Anthropological Studies in Culture and History  
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1 (West)  
20146 Hamburg  
manuel.bolz@uni-hamburg.de

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65 Cf. *Michi Knecht*: Nach Writing Culture, mit Actor-Network: Ethnografie/Praxeografie in der Wissenschafts-, Medizin- und Technikforschung. In: Sabine Hess/Johannes Moser/Maria Schwertl (eds.): *Europäisch-ethnologisches Forschen. Neue Methoden und Konzepte*. Berlin 2013, p. 79–107.