# Opacity of other minds, empathy and 'mindreading' in Samoa.

## A Samoan case study

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# Introduction

*"What a wee little part of a person's life are his acts and his words! His real life is led in his head, and is known to none but himself…. His acts and his words are merely the visible, thin crust of his world, with its scattered snow summits and its vacant wastes of water – and they are so trifling a part of his bulk! a mere skin enveloping it. The mass of him is hidden."*

Mark Twain, *Early Fragments 1870-1877*

It sounds like the perfect stuff for fiction, a story that combines the best ingredients of an adventure novel à la *Lord of the flies* and intelligent science-fiction like Skinner's *Walden II*: Opacity island – a beautiful tropical island in the no man's land of the South Pacific, surrounded by turquoise lagoons, inhabited by people who live together with their extended families in relatively small village compounds along the coastline and who never try to assess what is in another person's mind. They do not guess what another person might think or feel and they describe themselves as navigating through the social world without something we would call empathy. Is there an island, hidden in the middle of the Pacific, where people live autistically together? How can they interact with each other when all attempts to "mindread" are missing? When nobody attempts to put him- or herself in another's shoes?

When running over the pages of some recent anthropological writings about the so-called "doctrine of the opacity of other minds" (Robbins & Rumsey, 2008), one is inclined to consider this exotic kind of scenario to be true. Somewhere, in a far away land, things seem to be very different. At least at first glance. A closer look at the matter, however, suggests that the anthropological observations might not be that exotic. However, they seem to carry the potential to think about some very hotly debated questions in the field of social cognition from a new – a cross-cultural – perspective. The opacity doctrine refers to "the assertion, widespread in the societies of the Pacific, that it is impossible or at least extremely difficult to know what other people think or feel" (ibid., pp. 407-408). According to Robbins and Rumsey,

> opacity doctrines ought to force a rethinking of some fairly settled approaches to topics such as the nature of theories of mind, the role of intention in linguistic communication and social interaction more generally, and the importance of empathy in human encounters and in anthropological method. In all of these areas, Pacific assumptions about the impossibility of knowing the minds of others fundamentally contradict social scientific

> models that assume such knowledge is possible, and that further assume that gaining such knowledge stands universally as a regulating ideal for human beings in engagement with their fellows. (ibid., p. 408)

Interestingly, in mentioning theory of mind, the role of intention in linguistic communication and social interaction as areas where it is assumed that knowing other minds is possible, Robbins and Rumsey seem to aim at a very special conceptualization of linguistic communication and social interaction, namely, one that appears to be strongly influenced by the first term mentioned in the row: theory of mind (ToM). Do the authors claim that opacity phenomena make it questionable whether ToM really is the basis of social understanding and interaction? One could argue, however, that it is precisely the difficulty to know what other people think or feel that requires us from very early on to develop a ToM. But do the authors really refer to the same theory of mind conception as cognitive scientists and developmental psychologists? I think they do. Schieffelin, another anthropologist contributing to the issue on the opacity of other minds, writes that opacity assertions have "caused some scholars to question the universality of theory of mind, to ask whether theory of mind is innate or socialized, and to puzzle over how intersubjectivity is achieved in such communities" (Schieffelin, 2008, p. 431). Robbins and Rumsey do either deliberately allude to the theory of mind framework, or they are indeed strongly influenced by it. This is supported by their following questions:

> Can our theories imagine that we might approach other people without assuming that we can know something about what goes on in their heads? Or that we might interpret their speech without explicitly making guesses about their intentions producing it? Or that we can get along with others without assuming that we can replicate their thoughts and feelings within ourselves as a way of understanding how things are with them? Could we ever cooperate with each other without being able to mind-read on all these levels? At least as they talk about their lives, many people in the Pacific appear to answer yes to these questions. (Robbins & Rumsey, 2008, pp. 408-409)

In raising these questions, Robbins and Rumsey connect to the ongoing debate about how much "mindreading" is needed in order to interact socially. For example, varieties of the first question are also at the heart of the debate between cognitivists and embodiment theorists, the latter arguing that social interaction runs smoothly and does not require the interactional

partners to constantly think about what is going on in the other's head. The second question is hotly discussed within the field of pragmatics. While some scholars are arguing that interpreting speech does not require us to consider the intentions lying behind a certain speech act (e.g. Gauker, 2001), most think that we couldn't fully interpret the meaning of speech without grasping the other's intentions (cf. Grice, 1989), and some even suggest that "pragmatic interpretation is ultimately an exercise in mind-reading" (Sperber & Wilson, 2002, p. 3) so that ToM becomes a necessary precondition for pragmatic interpretation to be possible. Leudar and Costall say that "Grice provided psychology with a system which mentalizes communication" (2004, p. 612). ToM became so popular that followers of Grice like Sperber and Wilson "now refer to the inference of communicative intentions as 'mindreading'" (ibid., p. 612). Pragmatics is therefore a good example that proves how theory of mind ideas have influenced other academic disciplines. The third question raised above is very much inspired by simulationist accounts: within the field of theory of mind, two major theories try to explain how people manage to explain and predict observed behaviour in mentalistic terms, namely, *theory theory* and *simulation theory*. The fourth question explicitly uses the term mindreading – again a clear reference to the theory of mind framework (see chapter 2).

The same questions are at the heart of a growing interdisciplinary field interested in the topic of intersubjectivity, a field that is occupied by neuroscientists, cognitive scientists, developmental psychologists and philosophers from the analytical and phenomenological tradition – anthropologists were hitherto either ignored or remained silent themselves.

The fact that the very same questions are now raised by cultural anthropologists is interesting and gives rise to various suppositions. It might indicate that there exists another, hitherto neglected perspective that could potentially shed a different light on the matter. As already mentioned, however, it might also turn out that it shows nothing more than how widespread current cognitivist ideas about how we come to understand other minds actually are and that they have already influenced researchers in other disciplines like cultural anthropology. Robbins and Rumsey might also strategically allude to this debate in order to call the other researchers' attention to cultural anthropology as another discipline worth listening to. In any case, the alleged phenomenon of an opacity of mind turns out to be a meeting point where different conceptions of mind, intersubjectivity, sociality and empathy converge and collide.

The aim of this work is to clarify whether the implications of opacity reports are really as far-reaching as suggested by Robbins and Rumsey. To clarify this is important, since opacity claims are more than a peculiar feature of some Pacific islands – according to Rumsey, the

opacity claim "is in fact one of the most widely attested commonplaces in the folk psychologies of the world" (2011, p. 222). Such claims are not only common in many societies of the Southern Pacific, they are also pervasive in Central America, a region that does not have very much in common with the Southern Pacific. Kevin Groark tells us that "strikingly similar "opacity ideologies" have been documented among Mayan-speaking groups in highland and lowland settings throughout Southern Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala" (2011, p. 3).

In suggesting that the opacity of other minds phenomenon might shed new light on the theory of mind framework, however, Robbins and Rumsey (2008) did probably not consider that experimental psychologists might turn the tables, stick to the ToM framework and interpret the opacity phenomenon from within this framework. This would open up the possibility for a reinterpretation of the opacity phenomenon in terms of theory of mind, since representatives of the challenged ToM might give priority to their theoretical assumptions about the universality of ToM and consequently interpret the opacity phenomenon as something like a theory of mind deficit. This is certainly not what Robbins and Rumsey intended and maybe they did not foresee this. Ironically, Robbins and Rumsey opened up the possibility for a reductionist reinterpretation of an anthropological phenomenon – and this is clearly not something cultural anthropologists usually aim for.

Robbins and Rumsey make things even more complicated in saying that a "final area of theoretical and methodological concern to which Pacific opacity ideas are relevant is that of empathy" (2008, p. 415). Claims about the opacity or unknowability of other persons' minds can also be found in a recent issue of *Ethos* on empathy edited by Hollan and Throop (2008) as well as in a recent book with the title *The anthropology of empathy* edited by the same authors (2011). The anthropological reports presented in chapter 4 were either published in of the two publications just mentioned or in the *Anthropological Quarterly* issue on the opacity of other minds edited by Robbins and Rumsey (2008). At the end of chapter 4, it will be evident to the reader that it makes very much sense to discuss these contributions together. Finally, opacity claims are interesting with respect to their impact on theory of mind *and* empathy. Still, it makes sense already at this point to shortly demonstrate how closely both topics are related to each other. Kevin Groark, for example, who contributes to the *Ethos* issue on empathy, focuses very much on "social opacity" among the Tzotzil Maya (Groark, 2008) and links both empathy and opacity in the title of his article *Social opacity and the dynamics of empathic in-sight among the Tzotzil Maya of Chiapas, Mexico*. Both Feinberg (2011) and Throop (2008) published their articles in the publications which focus on empathy –

nevertheless, they confirm opacity claims and could easily have been part of the issue on the opacity of other minds as well. Talking about his contribution, Feinberg says that it "shares with most other chapters in this collection a concern with the impenetrability of other people's thoughts and feelings - the "opacity of other minds"" (2011, p. 152). Lepowsky, to give another example, explicitly suggests to explore the implications of opacity ideologies for the concept of empathy (2011, p. 44) and ends up talking more about the scope of opacity ideologies than about empathy. On the other hand, Robbins and Rumsey suggested that opacity doctrines do also force a rethinking of the importance of empathy and that those people who hold opacity doctrines "often describe their approaches to the world as ones that do not involve empathy" (Robbins & Rumsey, 2008, p. 416). Hollan and Throop are absolutely right in saying that these reports "are quite diverse in terms of the methods and analytical strategies utilized, the range of empathic behaviors observed or reported on, their rhetorical styles, and even their length" (2008, p. 390). More to the point: "All of this complexity is daunting" (ibid., p. 391).

What needs to be done is therefore as obvious as it is difficult. We need to clarify what the phenomenon of the opacity of other minds really is. Moreover, we must examine the relationship between both theory of mind and empathy and the specific contexts in which opacity claims were observed as well as the local theories and cultural patterns that gave rise to them. Such an endeavour is doomed to failure without clear-cut definitions of what is meant by theory of mind, empathy, and, of course, opacity of mind. Yet we will see that clear-cut definitions in this research area are hard to get. All this will require conceptual as well as textual work and critical analyses of existing anthropological data. It might also be reasonable to focus on a specific locale, since it is an open question whether the opacity of other minds phenomenon is the same across cultures. A clarification of what opacity in a specific locale is and how it relates to ToM requires the application of experimental methods as well. Therefore, the present study works with a combination of methods.

While it is the main goal of this work to use the case of Samoa for a clarification of how ToM, empathy and opacity doctrines interrelate, I pursue some intermediate goals on the way which contribute to ongoing discussions in the field of ToM and empathy research. These sub-goals are an important part of this work. The first sub-goal is to demonstrate how the notion of opacity automatically gives credit to the ToM framework. The second will be to provide better conceptual tools for the ToM and mindreading debate and to bring these concepts closer to our lifeworld. The third goal is to provide a definition of empathy which is broad enough to include anthropologically reported forms of empathy and narrow enough to

distinguish it from related concepts. A final goal will be to critically discuss certain interpretations of cross-cultural false belief results.

In chapter 1, I will write about the terms opacity and transparency and how they are commonly used. I will argue that the term opacity of other minds implies that the mind is hidden inside an opaque container or behind something like an opaque barrier and that the mere usage of the term opacity of other minds thus suggests to consider observable behaviour and mental states as two separate things. This basic assumption characterizes the ToM framework, which I will critically discuss in chapter 2. The notions of mental state attribution and mental state inference for the purpose of behaviour prediction and explanation will be identified as the core of ToM. I will demonstrate that the terms mental state attribution and -inference are often used interchangeably and argue that they should be distinguished. The more popular term 'mindreading' will be identified as a term which contains the basic ideas of ToM while suggesting that something like a direct, telepathic access to others' minds is possible. I will criticize this and contrast the 'mindreading' account with ideas from the phenomenological tradition which stress the possibility of a direct perception of others' mental states via their expressive behaviour. In the course of chapter 2, I will try to develop a 'conceptual tool kit' for a more exact description of what is going on in social encounters. Chapter 2 will end with definitions for the terms "contextreading", "direct perception", "mental state attribution", "mental state talk", "mindguessing", "mental state inference", and "false belief understanding". This conceptual tool kit is, I think, better suited for the description of concrete social phenomena than the slippery and too broad notion of 'mindreading'. Chapter 3 will sketch different uses of the term empathy and critically discuss some of its definitions. I will try to narrow down the use of this concept by distinguishing it from the concepts that are usually associated with the 'mindreading'-account and by suggesting that it is helpful to consider empathy as a primarily compassionate response that is typically present when encountering another human being. While we can determine via direct perception, contextreading and mental state inference *what* another person feels and *why*, I will argue that empathy helps us to assess the '*how*-aspect' of another's experience. Since the concept of empathy carries a lot of semantic shadings that are typical for Western culture, I will treat this definition as an interim result which must be adjusted to what other cultures have to say. Therefore, I will summarize various anthropological reports in chapter 4 and deduce how the authors use the term empathy and what they identify as local forms of empathy. Moreover, these contributions will be analyzed with respect to what they tell us about 'mindreading' and how the authors interpret the reported opacity claims. At the end of

this chapter, I will argue that these reports do not force us to rethink theory of mind – however, they help us to refine and enrich our view on empathy. One important insight of the anthropological authors is that people in many locales present something like an "opaque exterior" (Throop, 2008, p. 415) towards others, which makes mutual understanding more difficult. The chapter will end with a refined definition of empathy that is also valid for places where people demonstrate opaque exteriors. Since this chapter deals with a variety of different anthropological reports, it remains an open question whether what has been deduced from different reports does also apply to a single case. Therefore, the rest of this work will focus on Samoa. Chapter 5 will provide some basic information on Samoa and argue that Samoa is a suitable candidate for investigating the relationship between opacity claims, ToM and empathy. After talking about social structure and childhood in Samoa, I will present different concepts of Samoan folk psychology and focus on Samoan socialization practices. Against this detailed background, I will then turn to 'mindreading' and empathy in Samoa in order to spell out how they relate to opacity claims in this specific locale. While some final conclusions can already be drawn at this point, it remains an open question how false belief understanding – as one aspect of what is commonly associated with 'mindreading' – develops in Samoa. The second, empirical part of this work will therefore focus on false belief understanding among Samoan children. Finally, a synthesis of the theoretical and empirical part will summarize this work before I end with the discussion.

Before getting started, some preliminary reflections are necessary. The present study works with concepts from Western scientific practice (ToM, mindreading, empathy) in places with a very different cultural background and contrasts concepts that are specific to a certain locale with our own. This is not without problems. Kenneth Pike (cf. 1967) derived the terms *emic* and *etic* from the linguistic terms phonemic and phonetic. In cultural anthropology, these terms soon became popular heuristic tools to distinguish between two perspectives or stances anthropologists might take up towards their "data". Emic accounts describe behaviours of persons and cultural phenomena among certain groups in terms that are meaningful to these persons and to these groups, i.e., they try to adopt the others' point of view and provide an account that is in line with the concepts of the persons observed. The primary method is participant observation, since it provides insights in how people from other cultures talk and conceptualize phenomena. Etic accounts, on the other hand, use the vocabulary and concepts of the person who observes, i.e., the cultural anthropologist. He applies terms from his own background to other cultures. Etic accounts try to be culturally neutral and to use a terminology that is transferable. In Pike's words:

> It proves convenient – though partially arbitrary – to describe behavior from two different standpoints, which lead to results which shade into one another. The etic viewpoint studies behavior as from outside of a particular system, and as an essential initial approach to an alien system. The emic viewpoint results from studying behavior as from inside the system. (1967, p. 37)

There are good reasons to be careful when it comes to simple dichotomies. Headland notes that both terms are rather used "as a heuristic device" (1990, p. 18) and Pike emphasizes "that etic and emic data do not constitute a rigid dichotomy of bits of data, but often present the same data from two points of view" (Pike, 1967, p. 41).

The attempt to contribute to scientific debates with an emic approach faces a serious problem if not a paradox. Let's take the example of empathy. If cultural anthropologists do not start with a pre-given, Western concept or definition of empathy, but collect local data and phenomena which have their own names (for example: the Samoan *alofa* or Anutan *aropa*), how can they claim to contribute to empathy research? What could justify such a claim? How can they even correlate, associate or contrast observed phenomena with the Western notion of empathy without any preexistent conceptions of what empathy in a specific locale *might* be? A solution to this problem was suggested by Berry (1969), who says that anthropologists are first equipped with an emic concept of their own culture, which is then used as if it were etic, so to speak – at least, it serves as an "etic orientation" (Berry, 1990, p. 90). In doing so, the researcher has a valid basis for studying a phenomenon in another culture and judging how it differs from one's own emic concept. Berry referred to this approach as an *imposed etic* one (1969, p. 124). The paradoxical structure of anthropological research is, viewed in this light, not a problem – it is, in a sense, what makes research cross-cultural. In Berry's words: "We cannot be "cultural" without some notion like emic; and we cannot be "cross" without some notion like etic" (1990, p. 93). Correspondingly, the anthropological accounts presented in this work (especially in chapter 4) try to approach opacity, mindreading and empathy from both an emic and etic perspective. I will try to distinguish between the authors' own emic concepts which they use as imposed etics and emic concepts of the culture studied. Likewise, my own definition of empathy provided in chapter 3 will be treated as an imposed etic concept. However, in comparison with the derived emic concepts in chapter 4 and the derived Samoan concepts in chapter 5, this definition will be refined and adapted to the derived concepts in order to develop a definition that is as cross-culturally valid as possible.

A scientific comparative approach that is interested in emic concepts thus works as follows:

> It involves setting aside one's own cultural baggage (using imposed etic concepts and tools) and becoming thoroughly familiar with the new culture, to the point where valid knowledge is attained with an emic approach (usually through observation, participation, and other ethnographic methods). Once this is accomplished, the researchers have two conceptual systems at their disposal, and the act of comparison demands that they be brought into touch with each other. If they remain totally mutually exclusive, there is no possibility of comparison. However, if there are some features in common, comparison is possible, but only for these shared features; the common aspects for which comparison takes place were indicated by the term *derived* etic. That is, there are features that exist not only within one culture but also outside it. (Berry, 1990, p. 91)

Finally, I have to say a few words about some terms and how they will be used. This work deals with a lot of terms and expressions that are problematic or not well defined. It is one goal of this work to improve this situation, but for the time being, their use cannot always be avoided. The term 'mindreading' will be criticized in chapter 2. Nevertheless, I will use it in subsequent chapters in inverted commas to refer to the different aspects which are usually associated with it and which I will spell out more precisely at the end of the second chapter. Whenever I use the term "opacity claim", I refer to claims like those mentioned in the present introductory chapter by Robbins and Rumsey, i.e. to "the assertion, widespread in the societies of the Pacific, that it is impossible or at least extremely difficult to know what other people think or feel" (Robbins & Rumsey, 2008). Speaking of "opacity literature", I refer to the different anthropological contributions which focus either on the opacity of other minds phenomenon, local forms of empathy in the light of this phenomenon, or on relevant literature on Samoa, mainly the work of Alessandro Duranti, Bradd Shore, Elinor Ochs, Eleanor Ruth Gerber and Jeanette Mageo, although it is only Duranti who explicitly uses the term opacity. Whenever I speak of opacity, I refer to the alleged difficulty in assessing and talking about other people's mental states in the respective cultural environments.

Another term deserves further attention. Robbins & Rumsey (2008) speak of the *doctrine* of the opacity of other minds (2008). The word doctrine comes from the Latin *doctrina* and is used in a variety of different contexts. Robbins & Rumsey do not further justify their use of the term, however, it usually refers to a system of beliefs and teachings. Although the authors do not explicitly say so, the fact that they use the term "doctrine" suggests that the

phenomenon observed might be deep-seated in the societies at issue, and that it might furthermore be endorsed and put forward by commonly shared values and beliefs one must stick to. The term might even suggest that people who do not stick to it might be negatively sanctioned. I do not think that this is a very felicitous term. We will see in chapter 4 that the opacity of other minds is asserted in many places although people do engage in 'mindreading'-practices. Moreover, assertions of opacity are often context-specific. Therefore, I think that the term exaggerates the importance of opacity claims – at least in some places.[1]

Samoan terms will be introduced in italics. The Samoan translation for English terms or concepts is often put in parentheses. Whenever there is no specific reference provided for such a translation, I bear on the well-established *Samoan Dictionary* (Milner,1993).

[1] Interestingly, Gilbert Ryle begins his famous book *The concept of mind* with a chapter called "The Official doctrine" (cf. 2009). In this chapter, Ryle critically discusses Descartes' separation between mind and body and refers to this official and influential doctrine "with deliberate abusiveness, as 'the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine'" (ibid., 2009). This is interesting, since we will see in chapter 1 that the term 'opacity of other minds' suggests precisely this: to consider of mind and body as separate. However, I do not know whether Robbins and Rumsey (2008) allude to Ryle or whether this is mere coincidence.

# 1. Opacity and opacity of other minds

The aim of this chapter is to clarify the terms opacity and opacity of other minds. Both expressions are not as clearly established as 'mindreading', theory of mind, or empathy. Therefore, it is not possible to provide definitions of what opacity could possibly mean in a research field where people are interested in how we come to understand other minds. There are no definitions for the term opacity of other minds – unfortunately, Robbins and Rumsey (2008) launched this term without defining it. And many authors who contribute to the debate on the opacity of other minds phenomenon uncritically adopted the term. Therefore, I will start by analyzing how we commonly use terms like opacity and transparency. After doing so, I will ask whether it makes sense to speak of an opacity of other minds. Finally, the notion of "referential opacity" will shortly be introduced – a notion that will directly lead us to the subsequent chapter on theory of mind.

## 1.1 Opacity and transparency

In optics, the term opacity refers to the degree to which light is allowed to travel through matter. In everyday speech, we say that something is opaque if it is difficult to see through or perceive. We use the term when we speak of surfaces, barriers, or containers. The everyday use of the terms opacity and transparency identifies them as *visual* metaphors. Surfaces and barriers can be opaque, transparent, or something in between. Opacity and its counterpart transparency represent poles on a continuum with full opacity (a massive door, painted black) at one end and full transparency (a window after the window cleaner has just left) on the other. Let us take a cup as an example. A cup can be transparent like those you use for a delicious Latte Macchiato or it can be opaque like a mug for the nasty black coffee they provide you at your office. In the first case, there is little doubt about the content of the cup. You can directly perceive the white layer of milk and the layer of coffee in light brown and infer that it is probably coffee (or at least something that looks very much like it). In the second case, it is not so easy. You can stick to a rule and assume that there is coffee in the mug because that is what mugs are usually used for. But you cannot be sure. Someone might have run out of glasses and put his tomatoe juice inside. A closer look at the context might be helpful. If it is early in the morning and if the mug is in the middle of a breakfast table you might bet that there is coffee inside. If there are, however, wine glasses and bowls with olives on the same table while the full moon is shining brightly through one of the windows, you are probably less sure and might wonder whether there is wine in the mug – this student's kitchen

might have run out of wine glasses. Importantly, opacity in this example refers not to the *contained* (latte macchiato or coffee) but to that which contains (cup or mug), i.e. the *container*. This gives rise to the question whether we could use the terms opaque or transparent as well to refer to whatever is *in* a container. Let's think of coffee mugs again. For example, we could say that the liquid inside a mug is opaque in the case of black coffee and transparent in the case of mineral water, independent of whether the mug itself is opaque or transparent. Yet if we say that the coffee inside a mug is opaque, we do apparently say something that is different from saying that it is black. We imply something that goes beyond the simple statement that it is black, since we refer to the coffee's capacity to conceal something, to the fact that it is difficult to perceive something through it. Imagine a blowfly just drowned in one of two liquids in a transparent mug. If it drowned in mineral water, you would still see the blowfly because the glass *and* the liquid are transparent. If it drowned in black coffee, however, you would probably not see it, *although* the glass, i.e. the container, is transparent. In this example, we are in fact now dealing with two containers, simply because the introduction of a drowning blowfly has transformed what was called *the contained* into a second container: the liquid has now become a "container", a containing substance for the contained blowfly. Now imagine that the blowfly drowned in mineral water and imagine that its body parts were transparent, too. We might then be able to see its gastric content, but this content could be transparent as well and so on. To speak of something contained as being either opaque or transparent does therefore only make sense if the contained thing can principally contain something else, or, more precisely, if it can conceal or reveal something potentially lying behind it. Of course, the same line of reasoning equally applies to a barrier with something lying behind it. The terms opacity and transparency are therefore used for barriers, surfaces, substances or containers that have the potential to reveal of hide something else in or behind them. We use them to refer to objects' potential to *become* a container or barrier and thus specify their *potential* to reveal or hide something and implicitly treat them as being 1) either a (potential) *container for* or 2) a (potential) *barrier to* something else.

### 1.2 Opacity of other minds

Let us now come to the crucial question, namely, whether it makes any sense to speak of an opacity of other minds. If the above analysis of the word opaque is correct, then the mere use of the term "opacity of other minds" does either imply 1) that the mind of another person is contained in something opaque or hidden behind something opaque, or 2) that the mind is an opaque container for other things. In this view, the mind can somehow be seen but not its

contents, as the mind would be an opaque container *for* thoughts, emotions, intentions, etc. With regard to 1), the container or barrier would be our body and its overt behaviour, our gestures, facial expressions and everything that can be perceived from the outside. The contained would consequently be the mind. With respect to 2), the question whether the mind could be an opaque container for something else can only yield one possible answer, namely, that it "contains" our mental states. Note, however, that the distinction between 1) and 2) doesn't make much sense if we do not consider the mind as a whole to be something else than its constitutive processes and mental states. In the context of our considerations of how we come to understand other minds and in current approaches to social cognition like *theory of mind* (see next chapter), "mind" is just the general term for all that occurs "in it", i.e. thoughts, emotions, beliefs, intentions, etc. From this point of view, it doesn't make much sense to interpret the term "opacity of other minds" as referring to the mind as a container for mental states. Therefore, the use of the term "opacity of other minds" can only imply that others' mental states (that constitute the mind as a whole) are contained in something opaque or hidden behind something opaque. This container can only be our body, yet does it make sense to speak of an opacity of other bodies? It seems so. In a strictly biological sense, the outer demarcations of another body are clearly not transparent. I cannot see someone elses' heart or liver as long as I am not witnessing a pretty horrible scenario. But if we move away from the biological interior of another person to mental entities, I wouldn't be able to see someone elses's thoughts, intentions and emotions even if this person's body and interiors were transparent. I can, however, sometimes see the anger in another's face, his intention to grasp something in the outstretching of his arm or her sadness in her body posture. But rather than saying that in these cases the body is a transparent container *for* or a transparent barrier *to* the current emotions or intentions of this person, it would be much more adequate to say that his body is *expressing* these mental states. This is an important difference. The idea of a container or barrier, implicated in the terms opacity and transparency, would only make sense if the mind were something hidden behind something material, i.e. the body. But since our mental states are not objects that reside somewhere in our head, they wouldn't become more accessible to an outstanding observer even if the whole material body *were* transparent. Therefore, it is wrong to think of our body as a kind of container in which our mind resides.

So if both the relationship between body and mind on the one hand and between mind and mental states on the other are not a relationship between a container and something contained, then the use of the term opacity (or transparency) of other minds is inadequate and can

therefore only have a metaphorical meaning that cannot be fully understood when relying only on the primary visual meaning of the terms.

At this point, it should be obvious that the conventional meaning of the terms opacity and transparency as illustrated above cannot be simply transferred to human encounters. Since the relationship between mental states and observable behaviour is not a relationship between a container and something contained, the use of the term "opacity of other minds" boils down to the idea that mental states of other persons are *considered* to lie or treated *as if* lying behind a barrier. Since we use the term opacity to specify an object's potential to hide something, it might for example refer to another person's potential to hide the contents of his mind and whatever goes on inside of him. At this point, it remains an open question whether mental states are just treated in this way whilst they could be treated differently as well, or whether an observer or interactional partner really *cannot* "see" another person's mental states, as if they were *really* lying behind an opaque barrier. We will come back to this point in chapter 4, where "strong" opacity interpretations will be distinguished from "weak" ones.

An important result of the above analysis is that the mere use of the term opacity of other minds gives rise to the idea that mental states of others are hidden away behind an opaque barrier, that they are invisible and not directly perceivable. This is one of the very basic assumptions of the theory of mind framework that will be presented in the next chapter. From a ToM point of view, mental states are unobservable from the outside, they remain somewhere inside and must be inferred – and here we are: as soon as we speak of something being outside in contrast to something else that is inside, the notion of a barrier or container pops up, which automatically gives rise to the notions of opacity and transparency. Therefore, when cultural anthropologists introduce an expression like opacity of other minds, they automatically give credit to the theory of mind framework, whether they are aware of it or not. In the next chapter, I will outline this framework as well as its critics from the phenomenological tradition. Note, however, that although this framework was criticized for treating the mind as if lying behind an opaque barrier, many local ethnotheories across the Pacific and Central America seem to endorse a similar model in which private mental thoughts are considered to be hidden behind what is publicly presented (see chapter 4). In other words, while the usage of the term opacity of other minds can be criticized for implicitly supporting ideas à la theory of mind, the term might still accurately capture how people in specific locales conceptualize the relationship between private mental states and observable behaviour.

I have started from our everyday use of the term opacity. The term opacity of other minds, however, refers to the assertion that one cannot know what is in another persons mind as well as to ethnotheories and specific local understandings that give rise to such assertions. In order to know what opacity in a specific locale actually is, it will not suffice to analyze the term opacity. A closer look at the different anthropological reports is mandatory. In chapter 4, I will present summaries from anthropological observations in the Pacific as well as in Central America. Common to these reports is the observation that the opacity of other minds is asserted. As we will see, however, the reasons lying behind these assertions differ. What "opacity of other minds" actually means in a specific place must be derived from the existing reports and can only be answered individually for each place.

### 1.3 Referential opacity

The link of the term opacity to the theory of mind framework does not only become evident when considering its connotations and everyday use - it is also a link that was explicitly made by some researchers, since the term opacity is sometimes used in the expression "referential opacity" (Quine, 1964) to refer to a logical property of belief reports. For example, if we are told that there is a snake in the basket, and also that the snake is a plush toy, it follows that there is a plush toy in the basket. But if we are told that Sam is thinking that there is a snake in the basket, it does not follow from the fact that the snake is a plush toy that Sam is also *thinking* that there is a plush toy in the basket. The person whose mental state is described – in this example Sam – may not share the knowledge that the snake is a plush toy. Apperly and Robinson say that it is for this reason that "the transparency/opacity distinction has been used to illustrate what is gained as children learn to understand people's behaviour in terms of mental states" (2003, p. 298). For example, the transparency/opacity distinction was used to describe the difference between 3- and 5-year-old children in theory of mind tasks we will get to know in the next chapter: while others' mental states are transparent for 3-year-olds who do not yet have acquired a theory of mind, 5-year-olds understand the possibility of misrepresentation and therefore opacity (cf. Gopnik, 1993). In the same line, Mitchell linked an understanding of referential opacity to an understanding of the mind as representational (1996). These authors suggest that children's understanding of beliefs is related to their understanding of linguistic substitutions in belief reports like in the example given above.

### 1.4 Summary

Summing up, we can state that the term opacity gives rise to the idea that something like an opaque barrier or container conceals something else. To speak of an opacity of other minds amounts to suggesting that others' minds are hidden away and not perceivable. Therefore, the term opacity invokes a model of the relationship between mind and body that is usually traced back to Descartes and, more importantly, characteristic for the theory of mind framework. Another link between the term opacity and ToM was established by some authors who linked the understanding of referential opacity to the development of a theory of mind. Therefore, I argue that the mere use of the term opacity gives credit to the ToM framework, whether the authors using this term are aware of it or not.

## 2. ToM, its critique and the development of a 'mindreading' tool kit

In this chapter, I want to clarify some conceptual questions and develop the conceptual tools necessary for the later analyses of the anthropological reports. Since it is one aim of this work to clarify the relationship between opacity doctrines and ToM/mindreading, it will be mandatory to have a closer look at what ToM/mindreading is supposed to be. In the course of this analysis, I will suggest to abandon both terms and to use their most constitutive aspects as well as some concepts of alternative approaches instead since they are more precise. Furthermore, alternatives to the mindreading account will be discussed. At the end of this chapter, we will be able to distinguish between contextreading, direct perception, mental state attribution, mental state talk, mindguessing, mental state inference and false belief understanding.

### 2.1 Theory of mind

Maybe one of the shortest answers to the question of what psychology is all about is that it tries to understand the mind by scientific means – one's own as well as the mind of others. With that "in mind", the term *theory of mind* (ToM) seems to be nothing else than a description of the very agenda of academic psychology. But the theory and research it refers to are very specific and constituted a popular field within developmental psychology for the last 30 years. According to the theory, children who have acquired a theory of mind understand other people as well as themselves in terms of mental states. The behaviour of others is no longer an intransparent display of mysterious actions but a meaningful expression of their desires, beliefs, thoughts etc. For many researchers, the ability to attribute mental states to oneself and to others is one of the main achievements in childhood, opening up a wider understanding of the social world and crucial in understanding and predicting the behavior of others. Children at a certain age begin to realize "that the overt actions of self and others are the products of internal mental states such as beliefs and desires" (Wellman, 1990, p. 1). In contrast, 3-year-old children without a fully developed theory of mind "view thoughts and beliefs in themselves and in others as directly mirroring the real world" (ibid.). It is therefore a major social-cognitive achievement to understand "that people act on the basis of their representations of reality rather than reality itself" (Callaghan et al., 2005, p. 378).
The investigation of the development of children's ability to understand human activity by the attribution of mental states to people has become a very popular field of developmental research, labelled theory of mind research. To have a theory of mind means, generally

speaking, “to be able to think about such abstract stipulations as thoughts, as if they, like physical objects, could be taken as objects of thought” (Feldman, 1988, p. 126). The term “Theory of Mind” has first been used by Premack & Woodruff (1978) who used the expression to think about the chimpanzees’ mind. The authors attempted to show that a chimpanzee can interpret the goal-directed behavior of a human actor. They defined theory of mind as follows:

> An individual has a theory of mind if he imputes mental states to himself and others. A system of inferences of this kind is properly viewed as a theory because such states are not directly observable, and the system can be used to make predictions about the behavior of others. As to the mental states the chimpanzees may infer, consider those inferred by our own species, for example, purpose or intention, as well as knowledge, belief, thinking, doubt, guessing, pretending, liking, and so forth. (ibid., p. 515)

The basic elements of Premack and Woodruff’s definition are still constitutive of many modern theory of mind definitions. Pring (2005), for example, defines theory of mind as follows:

> [´Theory of mind´ is] the ´everyday´ ability to understand other people´s beliefs, thoughts and desires in order to explain and predict their behaviour. With the ability to infer mental states, like the true and false beliefs of oneself and others, children become more capable of participating in a wide range of conversational and social interactions. (ibid., p. 2)

Theory of mind, therefore, is the ability to infer mental states in order to predict and explain behaviour. In the same issue of Premack and Woodruff’s influential article, the philosopher Daniel C. Dennett argued that a convincing experimental theory of mind test must not be based on the ascription of true, but false beliefs (1978). A prediction of another person’s behaviour on the basis of a true belief cannot be distinguished from an inference on the basis of one’s own knowledge about reality and how to deal with it. In order to do so, my own knowledge about reality must differ from the knowledge of someone else, as it is the case in situations where another person is holding a false belief. The developmental psychologists Wimmer and Perner (1983) were the first to come up with an experimental paradigm. In the following years, different varieties of the so-called false belief task produced an immense amount of experimental data. For the further reflections in this chapter, it will be important to

remark that theory of mind research was from the very beginning closely linked to the experimental paradigms invented to measure it. I argue that one could justifiably say that the experimental paradigms co-constituted how theory of mind was generally understood, as it was and still is almost impossible to say what a theory of mind is supposed to be without relying on what is happening in the tasks designed for its measurement. I will come back to this point later.

Although the term theory of mind implies that we have something like a theory about others' minds, such a view is in fact restricted to one of the two major theory of mind accounts, namely, *theory theory*. In contrast to this account, *simulation theory* denies that we need something theory-like to understand others in terms of mental states. The debate between these two accounts has a long history and can only be sketched out here in its basics. For the purpose of this work, however, the differences between these two accounts are not as important as what they share.

Theory theorists talk about a theory because they assume two things: First, mental states are believed to be unobservable and thus theoretical. Second, ideas about internal states are believed to form a coherent system from which one can predict or explain behavior (Wellman, 1990). Some authors speak of a folk psychological understanding, referring to the fact that people act to fulfil their desires in the light of their beliefs (Jenkins & Astington, 1996).

Proponents of the theory theory subscribe to the notion that 4- to 5-year-olds think like small cognitive scientists (Harris, 1992). Like scientists, children make certain experiences and change their theories about others as a consequence:

> According to the theory theory, people understand others by recourse to a theory about others' mental states and traits […] For example, after repeated experience with people acting in ways that do not match reality, one comes to realize that others can have false beliefs. (Lillard, 1998, p. 25)

Theory theorists argue that our knowledge about the mind comprises not a formal scientific theory but an informal, everyday theory based on conceptual knowledge: "One takes in data concerning the person, consults the theoretical knowledge, and arrives at some folk psychological understanding" (ibid., p. 4). In the view of theory theorists, such an everyday understanding of the mind is best understood as a succession of naïve theories and changes in those conceptions are therefore theory changes (Gopnik & Wellman, 1994).

Bartsch and Wellman (1995) have argued that children begin with a desire psychology, then progress to a desire-belief psychology and finally attain a belief-desire psychology typical for adults with a full understanding of the representational character of the mind. Forguson and Gopnik (1992) argue that compared with 3-year-olds, 4-year-olds have developed a representational theory of mind, a model that construes "the relation between the mind and external reality as mediated by mental representations: mental states with contents that have satisfaction conditions in the external world" (ibid., p. 236). This view was made prominent by Perner (1991), who argues that there is no understanding of false belief without an understanding of misrepresentation. Wellman (1990) suggests that the development towards a representational theory of mind is caused by a conceptual change. In this view, early psychological understanding - a naïve psychology - gets slowly revised because social information leads to a new theory that replaces the old (Sodian & Thoermer, 2006).

In contrast, proponents of simulation theories believe that "children improve their grasp of folk psychology by means of a simulation process" (Harris, 1992, p. 120). Here, mental states of others become accessible through a kind of role-taking process. The understanding of other minds is therefore not based on conceptual knowledge. To read someone's mind is nothing else than to "re-evoke the other's mental state" in oneself (Lillard, 1998, p. 4).

In this view, what develops in the course of time is the ability to run more accurate and complex simulations. Some indirect support for the simulation account comes from the discovery of the mirror neurons. These neurons discharge not only when one executes a goal-related movement, but also when one observes other people doing the same movement. Some believe that mirror neurons provide a mechanism of "embodied simulation, which can provide a direct access to the meaning of actions and intentions of others" (Gallese, 2007, p. 662).

Speaking about the differences between theory theory and simulation theory, Gordon describes the theory theory as a "*cold* methodology: a methodology that chiefly engages our intellectual processes, moving by inference from one set of beliefs to another, and makes no essential use of our own capacities for emotion, motivation, and practical reasoning" and the simulation theory as a "*hot* methodology, which exploits one's own motivational and emotional resources and one's own capacity for practical reasoning" (1996, p. 11).

In the same line, Gallese and Goldman characterized theory theory as a "detached" theorizing whereas from the point of view of simulation theory, people are more actively involved when trying to understand others (cf. 1998, p. 497). Thompson makes an interesting remark: "Given this difference, it is not surprising that empathy figures prominently in the simulation-theory

account of mind-reading" (2001, p. 11). The influence of simulation theory in definitions and usages of the term empathy will become evident in the following chapter on empathy.
I have mentioned above that for the purpose of this work, the differences between these two theories are not as important as their commonalities. According to Thompson, both theories "take mind-reading to be a matter of how we infer from outward behaviour that others possess unobservable inner mental states" (2001, p. 13). I will focus on this observation in the remainder of this chapter.
In recent years, theory of mind research was integrated into the broader field of social cognition and has become more interdisciplinary in nature, bringing together neuroscientists, psychologists and philosophers. Moreover, the capacities that were originally associated with the term theory of mind are now also associated with a very popular and more and more common term: *mindreading*.

## 2.2 Mindreading

More than 30 years ago, the philospher Daniel C. Dennett raised a question in his book *Brainstorms*: "Is it *in principle* possible that brain scientists might one day know enough about the workings of our brains to be able to "crack the cerebral code"and read our minds?" (1978, p. 39). The notion of mindreading, due to its paranormal connotations, can hardly sound less scientific. Costall, Leudar and Reddy (2006) even presume that the term, because of its use in magical contexts, "must have initially been invoked in Theory of Mind circles with some humorous intent, even self-irony" (ibid., p. 166) and – after critically discussing the concept - conclude their paper with the following words: "Mind-reading, in short, far from being a serious theoretical option, needs to be recognized for what it is – a joke" (ibid.). But as a matter of fact, people use the term in very serious, scientific discussions. In his questionable struggle to build a mindreading device, John-Dylan Haynes from the Bernstein Center of Computational Neuroscience in Berlin is one of the few researchers out there who somehow understand and use the term in its original and literal sense, since he really tries to read mental states from brain states (cf. Haynes et al., 2007). Meanwhile, however, the term has acquired a much more common meaning which coincides with what was usually coverd by the term theory of mind. In a sense, the term mindreading has become something like a successor of the theory of mind debate, inheriting the most basic ideas of both theory theory and simulation theories while circumventing the differences and endless disputes between them. So when psychologists ask how we come to understand other people, a nowadays very popular answer is to say that we engage in mindreading. It is striking how liberally this term

is still used. Shannon Spaulding frankly claims: “No one, to my knowledge, denies that mindreading occurs” (2010, p. 137). According to Antaki (2004), “ToM proponents put inverted commas around 'mind-reading', as if they mean the term only figuratively, but then proceed essentially as if people do actually read minds” (pp. 667-668). In some definitions, the link to theory of mind is obvious and made explicit. For example, Barr and Keysar (2005) say that a “goal of research in cognitive science is to understand the nature of human “mindreading” – not, of course, mindreading in the magical or paranormal sense but, rather, in the mundane sense of how people apply theory of mind in order to infer the mental states of other people” (ibid., p. 271). According to the authors, mindreading is not about magic or paranormal skills, but refers to how theory of mind is used to infer mental states. Whereas the term mindreading is considered to evoke notions of magical or paranormal skills, the terms theory of mind and mental state inference are presented here as more mundane and left without further explanation, as if they were self-explanatory and unquestionable, not in need of further definition. The authors themselves add that “the term “mindreading” has been used rather liberally to denote a broad variety of activities related to social cognition” (2005, p. 273). Malle (2005) defines mindreading as “the human activity of inferring other people’s mental states” (ibid., p. 26) and seems to aim for “a unified theory of mental state inference” (ibid.). In this definition, Malle seems to suggest that mindreading amounts to mental state inference. In the literature, the terms mental state inference and mental state attribution are often used interchangeably. Whereas Malle uses the former to define mindreading, Barr & Keysar (2005) use both to explain what mindreading is: “The development of mindreading abilities throughout the lifespan can be characterized as a trajectory away from egocentrism and toward greater and more nuanced mental attribution” (ibid., p. 272). In the same paper, they understand mindreading as the application of theory of mind “in order to infer the mental states of other people” (ibid., p. 271). According to Barr and Keysar, mental state inference and mental state attribution are either identical or both constitutive for mindreading practices.

We can conclude, that both theory of mind and mindreading are apparently about mental state inference and attribution. But what is the difference between mental state inference and mental state attribution? Is there a difference? Although both terms are often used interchangeably, it might be worth asking whether this interchangeable usage is justified. I think there are good reasons to distinguish between both. First, their semantics suggest to use them more carefully. Inference might be prior to attribution, simply because in order to attribute something to someone, I often need a reason that justifies my attribution, and this reason might be an inferred one. Second, the term mental state inference seems to fit better

into the theory theory framework, where mental states have to be inferred from non-mental evidence on the basis of theoretical knowledge or rules before they can be attributed to someone else. In simulation theory, I experience the mental state of another person in my own mind on the basis of a simulation process. Consequently, it seems as if I do not have to *infer* that mental state. I only have to *attribute* it to someone else after experiencing it for myself as a result of simulation processes. If this was true, then the idea of mental state inference would have no place in simulation theory. As a consequence, it would also be wrong to equate mental state inference and mental state attribution or to use both terms interchangeably. As a matter of fact, there are many versions of simulation theory, and some explicitly deny the necessity of inference (cf. Gordon, 1995). But there is evidence that inference might be involved in certain versions of simulation theory as well. In one of the most paradigmatic descriptions of simulation theory, Goldman (1992) says:

> The initial step…is to imagine being 'in the shoes' of the agent…. This means pretending to have the same initial desires, beliefs, or other mental states that the attributer's background information suggests the agent has. The next step is to feed these pretend states into some inferential mechanism, or other cognitive mechanism, and allow that mechanism to generate further mental states as outputs by its normal operating procedure…. More precisely, the output should be viewed as a pretend or surrogate state, since presumably the simulator doesn't feel the *very same* effect or emotion as a real agent would. Finally, upon noting this output, one ascribes to the agent an occurrence of this output state. Predictions of behavior would proceed similarly…. In short, you let your own psychological mechanism serve as a 'model' of his. (ibid., p. 21)

Goldman explicitly speaks of an "inferential mechanism here". Moreover, the question arises how the simulator knows which desires, beliefs, or other mental states he must pretend and feed into this inferential mechanism. Since Goldman says that the attributer's background information suggests specific mental states, it seems as if these initial mental states are inferred as well. I do not want to discuss this issue deeper – it leads us to a serious problem of this variety of the simulation account, namely, the problem that the simulation procedure requires what it is supposed to explain: the knowledge of another person's mental states. Although the term mental state inference, at first glance, fits better into the theory theory framework, it seems as if inference might also be involved in simulation theory. One might therefore argue that it would be justified to use both mental state inference and mental state

attribution interchangeably if both always went hand in hand. A closer look at some concrete examples, however, should convince us that both terms should be distinguished. A very obvious example for mental state attribution without prior inference are cases of anthropomorphism. If people describe an ant as sad, they attribute a mental state to an insect without having anything like a justified reason for doing so, since the ant's sadness is neither perceivable nor are there any theoretical reasons for assuming that ants can feel sadness at all. Or consider children's play with dolls. A young girl might construct a narrative and, on the basis of this narrative, infer that the doll is sad. However, the girl might also start her play with the statement that her doll is sad. The latter case is again an example for mental state attribution without prior or co-occuring inference, although the girl might of course continue her play by providing reasons for the doll's sadness *ex post*. Besides anthropomorphism, consider the phenomenon of projection, understood in the original psychoanalytic sense. In this case, I project my own innerpsychic conflicts, affects, or thoughts onto another person. In other words, I attribute my own mental states to him, although not necessarily consciously. I argue that in this case, mental states are again attributed to another person but not inferred beforehand, since I simply project what is already there in my own mind onto another.

The next example focuses on gossip, since this will also be of relevance in the review of the anthropological reports in chapter 4. If people try to make sense of an absent person's behaviour in gossip, if they speculate which motives or reasons might have led to a certain behaviour of that person, then gossipers use mental-state-talk and thus tentatively attribute mental states to that person. Let's consider two cases of gossip. In the first case, the gossipers witnessed what they are gossiping about, i.e., they had direct perceptual evidence. In the second case, the gossipers were told about the same event by someone, i.e., they have a story but they had no direct perceptual evidence. In the first case, a man – I will call him Jim - insulted someone and hit him in the face. Jim, however, is normally known for his peaceful attitude. The gossipers were present when Jim did this. Some hours later, the gossipers meet and talk about why Jim behaved like this and conclude that he must have been very angry. In doing so, they attribute a mental state to him, but did they *infer* it? Did they have to make an inference in order to be able to attribute anger to Jim? According to Gallagher, inference "in some minimal sense involves moving from some known information, which one takes as a clue or as evidence, to something that is not known" (2008, p. 537, footnote 3). Yet seeing someone insulting and attacking another person is an *expression* of anger that is directly perceivable. So is Jim's anger "something that is not known" in the moment it is perceived? If we say that anger must be inferred from observed behaviours like insulting and attacking, then

we automatically deny that certain behaviours might be sufficiently expressive of a certain mental state – we transform them into mere behaviour without mental significance. If we take this example as a case of mental state inference, then we end up using the term in a very broad sense that does not even match Gallagher's minimal definition, since it is not very convincing to say that we move from known information (observed insult and attack) to something that is not known (anger). We immediately perceive Jim *as* angry. The anger must not be inferred in addition to that which is directly perceivable.[2] Moreover, the anger does not have to be attributed to Jim while seeing him insulting and attacking, since any expression of anger is not perceived independently from the person that expresses it. I do not directly perceive anger and must attribute it to Jim in a second step. Rather, I directly perceive *his* anger, anger *he* expresses, the perceived anger does already belong to Jim and there is no need to figure out via subsequent attribution whom it belongs to. Therefore, I suggest that the first case of the gossip example is another example for mental state attribution without mental state inference.

In acknowledging this, I think we are on to something very important that hasn't clearly been spelled out before, since the distinction between mental state inference and mental state attribution might help us to break down the term mindreading into two different components that have been mixed up so far.

Now imagine a group of gossipers talking about the same situation, but this time, nobody actually witnessed the situation they are talking about – they just heard about it from someone else. In this case, they attribute mental states as well, but they had no perceptual evidence. In this case, we can say that the gossipers infer the anger, since they move from known information (Jim insulted and attacked someone) to something that is not known (Jim was angry). In speculating about the reasons for this person's behaviour, the gossipers construct a coherent story, and anger is a possible, although not certain mental state one can infer on the basis of behaviours such as insulting and attacking. It might be more appropriate, however, to speak of *mindguessing* in this case, since the notion of guessing makes clearer that these kinds of inferences are errorprone. I will come back to this point later.

Summing up, what theory theory, simulation theory, and the mindreading-account have in common is that in order to understand other people's behaviour, one must infer and/or attribute mental states to them. I argued that it makes sense to distinguish between both

[2] Note, however, that the directly perceivable expression of anger does not *constitute* the psychological state – at least not fully. In arguing that anger can be perceived directly without the need for attribution or inference, I am not denying that there is more to the experience of anger than what is expressed. Nevertheless, its expressed components are usually sufficient for others to understand which emotional state is displayed. The question is not whether the bodily expression of anger exhausts its experience. According to Zahavi, the point of

mental state inference and mental state attribution, although both terms regularly appear in definitions of mindreading. It was further argued that the term mindreading does normally not refer to a direct perception of mental states, although the semantics of the term suggest precisely this. Although this would be a good reason to abandon the term, it is still widely used. Ian Apperly (2011), for example, even prefers the term mindreading to the term theory of mind since it is an open question whether having a theory is necessarily involved in the processes and abilities ToM is thought to explain. According to Apperly, the term mindreading is more neutral. We have seen that mindreading refers to mental state inference and attribution, although the term, taken literally, suggests a practice that would precisely not need inference or attribution since it refers to the most direct access to another person's mental states one could think of. In my opinion, mindreading is the more presumptuous choice. If mental state inference and attribution are at the core of both ToM and mindreading, why don't we simply use the former terms? In contrast to the term theory of mind, mindreading implies – at least for laymen - the idea of a direct perception of others' mental states. Such a "direct perception view" of mental states does indeed exist and has its origins in the phenomenological tradition. Ironically, it is an approach that evolved in opposition and as a critique to the mindreading approach. Whereas mindreading, in the word's literal sense, suggests direct perception, direct perception approaches have evolved in a very different scientific tradition – and this is, I think, an important reason to abandon the term mindreading. Finally, I think that there is another very simple reason why people prefer to use the term mindreading instead of mental state inference and mental state attribution. The reason for doing so is precisely that mental state inference and mental state attribution, as argued above, *should* be distinguished. This makes things more complicated and suggests to do away with a very handy term. If researchers use mindreading for a variety of phenomena, they do not have to think about what *exactly* is going on, mental state inference, mental state attribution, or both. The term mindreading therefore clouds the underlying processes. This is, I think, the main reason why we should abandon the term. But now, let's turn to an approach where direct perception really *means* direct perception.

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controversy is rather "whether bodily expressivity has intrinsic psychological meaning, or whether whatever psychological meaning it has is derived" (2011, p. 549).

## 2.3 Phenomenological critique and the "direct perception view"[3]

At the bottom of the idea that other people's mental states must be inferred lies another and in a way deeper assumption, namely, that there is a gap between the minds of persons (cf. Leudar & Costall, 2009a). A gap that has to be bridged somehow in order to make sense of other persons:

> The supposition is precisely that the other person's mental states are hidden away and are therefore not accessible to perception. I cannot see into your mind; hence I have to devise some way of inferring what must be there, based on evidence that is provided by perception. (Gallagher, 2008, p. 536)

Such a view, in speaking of the hiddenness and non-accessibility of the mind, is in line with the analysis of the term opacity given in the first chapter, as it suggests that there is something indiscernable, something lying beyond the perceivable behaviours and expressions of other persons. This was confirmed by Zahavi who recently wrote that both theory theory and simulation theory "have been accused of presupposing the fundamental opacity of other minds" (2011, p. 546). Assuming a gap between the minds of persons is the logical consequence of a specific conceptualization of the mind. Overgaard (2007) argues that "if we think about the mind as constituting an inner realm of its own, separated in various ways from the "external" world, then something like the epistemological problem of other minds is likely to pop up sooner or later" (ibid., p. 2). As a consequence, "one needs to get into the other person's head and find out what their mental states are" (Gallagher, 2008, p. 536). This conceptualization is normally traced back to Descartes. Cartesian dualists would claim that the minds of others are essentially inaccessible to direct experience. It is hard to deny that the content of one's own mental life is experienced in a way the content of another's mental life is not. It feels intuitively wrong to assume that there is no such thing as an inner realm of experience, hidden from others, opaque for outstanding spectators. Nevertheless, it feels likewise wrong to assume that the mental lives of others are completely inaccessible for outside spectators. Researchers in the phenomenological tradition have focused on the latter intuition and provided alternatives to approaches where another person's subjective life is

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[3] The notion of direct perception was made popular by Gibson and originally referred to visual perception (cf. Gibson, 1979). In the context of the present debate, however, it refers solely to the perception of others' mental states. Although Zahavi rightly says that there "isn't any established view on what "direct" means" (2011, p. 548), I will – in line with Zahavi – use the term in the sense that the perception of another's emotional state like

only graspable via conclusion by analogy or inference. Common to these critics is the emphasis on the perceivable aspects of others' minds.[4] This was also a major concern to the later Wittgenstein. His following words can be read like an early critique of simulation accounts:

> Look into someone else's face, and see the consciousness in it, and a particular *shade* of consciousness. You see on it, in it, joy, indifference, interest, excitement, torpor, and so on…Do you look into yourself in order to recognize the fury in *his* face? (Wittgenstein, 1967, cited in Overgaard, 2006, p. 65)

Wittgenstein also rejects the idea that we arrive at other people's mental states via analogy, deduction or inference. In this sense, the following two quotes appear like a critique of ToM and mindreading accounts:

> In general I do not surmise fear in him – I *see* it. I do not feel that I am deducing the probable existence of something inside from something outside; rather it is as if the human face were in a way translucent and that I were seeing it not in reflected light but rather in its own. (Wittgenstein, 1980, cited in Overgaard, 2006, p. 64)

> "We *see* emotion." – As opposed to what? – We do not see facial contortions and *make the inference* the he is feeling joy, grief, boredom. We describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the features. Grief, one would like to say, is personified in the face. (Wittgenstein, 1980, cited in Overgaard, 2006, p. 65)

Overgaard reminds us that Wittgenstein was eager "to emphasize that the human body and human behavior are full of "mental" significance" (2007, p. 24). If human behaviour and the human body are full of "mental significance" and if they express something that does not point to a mental event hidden beyond the body and behaviour, but if expression in itself must be thought of as mental (Overgaard, 2005; Fuchs, 2011), then mental state inference seems

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anger can be directly perceived as such without the need for an intermediary step (e.g., reliance on theory, inference).

unnecessary for the understanding of others – superfluous, as expressive behaviour is perceived directly. As argued in the example above, in seeing Jim insulting and attacking someone, I perceive Jim *as* angry.

The direct perception view is currently endorsed by philosophers in the phenomenological tradition. Shaun Gallagher, one of the most prominent opponents of theory theory and simulation theory, criticizes that both these approaches "posit something more than a perceptual element as necessary for our ability to understand others" (2008, p. 535) and says that "we see or more generally perceive in the other person's bodily movements, facial gestures, eye direction, and so on, what they intend and what they feel" (Gallagher, 2004, p. 204). In contrast to the mindreading account, Gallagher advocates the idea that "we have a direct perceptual grasp of the other person's intentions, feelings, etc." (2008, p. 535). He says: "In most of our ordinary and everyday intersubjective situations we have a direct, perception-based understanding of another person's intentions because their intentions are explicitly expressed in their embodied actions" (2004, p. 205). This idea has a long tradition within phenomenological philosophy. In his book *The nature of sympathy*, the German philosopher Max Scheler says:

> For we certainly believe ourselves to be directly acquainted with another person's joy in his laughter, with his sorrow and pain in his tears, with his shame in his blushing, with his entreaty in his outstretched hands…And with the tenor of his thoughts in the sound of his words. If anyone tells me that this is not 'perception', for it cannot be so, in view of the fact that a perception is simply a 'complex of physical sensations'…I would beg him to turn aside from such questionable theories and address himself to the phenomenological facts. (Scheler, 1954, cited in Gallagher, 2008, pp. 260-261)

Phenomenologists argue that we do neither need theories, nor simulations or inferences to directly perceive another person's mental states. The examples provided are mostly emotional states that can be expressed via bodily postures, mimics and gesture. Shaun Gallagher says:

> The claim here is not that direct perception (or other aspects of this approach – the reliance on context, social roles, narrative, etc.) can penetrate to the soul of the other person and

[4] I am aware of the fact that there are many different and conflicting positions within phenomenology and that there is not *one* phenomenological critique to approaches that assume a gap between the minds of persons. Even phenomenologists might focus on alterity and on the fundamental difference between self and other (cf. Levinas, 1969). However, those researchers in the phenomenological tradition who critically argue against the theory of mind framework indeed share the idea that others' mental states can be directly perceived.

> discover her innermost emotional states. Nor is the claim that we can never be misled by what we perceive. The claim is rather that for the most part, in most of our encounters in everyday life, direct perception delivers sufficient information for understanding others. (Gallagher, 2008, p. 540)

Notice, that Gallagher mentions other aspects of the direct perception approach, namely, the reliance on context, social roles and narratives that add to the direct perception of expressed emotional states. Within the mindreading approach, observable behaviour and context are normally considered to be the bases on which we infer another's mental states. And on the basis of attributed mental states we predict and explain the other person's behaviour. A question that naturally arises here is whether behaviour could not be predicted and explained on the basis of observable behaviour and context *alone*, without the extra step that involves assessing another's mental states.

### 2.4 Contextreading

The possibility of direct perception might apply to expressed emotions, but what about thoughts, inner speech, silent monologues and considerations? Of course, one might see *that* another person is thinking (cf. Overgaard, 2005). Nowhere is this truth better illustrated than in Rodin's *Le Penseur*. A professional Poker player, in contrast, might not display any facial expression at all that might lead one to the idea that he is thinking. In this case, it is the context of the game that justifies the assumption that he is probably thinking. In the case of chess, we cannot read a chess-players mind who is planning his next move, but we can read the context of the game and thus infer what his considerations or his next move might be. Imagine two chess players playing against each other. This seems to be a paradigmatic case for mindreading: I have to infer my opponent's thoughts, explain his past move and predict what my opponent's next move will be, which strategy she is following, what her plans are. From another point of view, however, I just have to think about the pattern on the board. If my chessmen are in pattern A and my opponent's chessmen in pattern B, then certain moves are automatically, i.e. by the rules of the game, good moves while others are bad moves. Some moves could be called "risky moves", i.e., moves, that are good if and only if my opponent is not very attentive and that are bad moves if he is attentive. What makes a risky move a good move is not the fact that my opponent cannot successfully read my mind, i.e. infer my thoughts – it is the fact that she is not able to infer the implications of my move for the game, that she does not consider all possible moves. That she tries to read my mind is, at

least in this case, just a metaphor that points to her fear that she might have overlooked something on the board that I am aware of. Her uneasiness while planning her next move demonstrates precisely that she *cannot* read the content of my mind, and in going on to think about why I did move my queen directly in front of her king without any further protection she is not reading my mind, but trying to make sense of all the chessmen's configuration on the board on the background that she can't read my mind. In this example, mindreading is just a metaphor for contextreading. I can't see in the mind of my opponent what her next move will be, but I can try to engage in "board-reading" and if I read the board successfully, I might indeed be able to predict my opponent's next move correctly. This might feel like successful mindreading while it is in fact nothing more than intelligent and attentive contextreading, based on a sufficient understanding of the rules of the game.[5] I will therefore use the term contextreading to refer to the ability to make sense of situations, circumstances and the course of events without the necessity to infer mental states, for example by considering rules or norms.

When it comes to Poker, we do not only engage in contextreading (cards in the game and number of players), but in bodyreading as well, i.e., in the direct perception of what the other person's body expresses (sweat, tremor, breath, etc.). What we try to read is not the other's mind but the persuasiveness of his bodily expressions that might indicate whether he is bluffing or not on the basis of evidence we have as a consequence of attentive contextreading.

Here is another example. If I go to the bakery and ask for half a kilo of dark bread, the woman behind the desk will normally give it to me and my first interpretation of her behaviour would probably not be a mentalistic one ("She is giving me the bread because she *wants* to") but one that refers to her social role, to what is expected from her ("She is giving me the bread because that's what people who work in a bakery do") – if I need an explanation in such situations at all. In this example, I would neither explain nor predict her behaviour by reference to a mental state but to her social role as a baker, i.e., by reference to the situational context.

Note, however, that while contextreading makes mental state inference superfluous in many situations, contextreading can also help to infer another's mental state in some cases. For example, noticing a mount of facial tissues at her bedside, and realizing that Leonard Cohen's *A thousand kisses deep* has been played again and again, I might conclude that she is sad by way of inference. Yet with respect to most of the examples provided so far, it seems as if

[5] In the chess example, I wanted to demonstrate that contextreading is sufficient. If it were not, a match against a chess computer would be impossible. If we play against human beings, however, contextreading cannot be separated from other ongoing processes that might indeed be aimed at what the opponent is up to.

Gallagher is justified in saying: "In seeing the actions and expressive movements of the other person in the context of the surrounding world, one already sees their meaning; no inference to a hidden set of mental states (beliefs, desires, etc.) is necessary" (2008, p. 542).
Where, one might ask, is mindreading involved at all in everyday life, if we can make sense of most situations via direct perception and contextreading?[6] Gallagher's view, or, more generally, the direct perception approach of mental states, is not unchallenged, however. In the following, I will focus on two critics, Shannon Spaulding and Mitchell Herschbach.

### 2.5 Critics of direct perception

Shannon Spaulding argues that the examples provided by Gallagher to criticize accounts based on mental state inference are rather examples of bodyreading than mindreading (2010, p. 122). According to her, Gallagher's account of direct perception and related ideas in the field of embodied cognition claim that in most cases, we get along socially without mindreading and engage in it only in rare circumstances, encountering very strange or unusual behaviour. In contrast, the mindreading account claims that "for the most part, mindreading is how we get along socially" (2010, p. 124). According to Spaulding, Gallagher's argument that our ordinary interactions do not seem to involve mindreading, i.e. explaining and predicting others' mental states, "is subject to the objection that an appeal to phenomenology is unjustified in this context because much of mindreading is supposed to be non-conscious, at the sub-personal level, and phenomenology cannot tell us what is happening at the sub-personal level" (ibid., p. 129). Spaulding represents the mindreading account in a very straightforward way as an account about sub-personal processes, as the following quotations unmistakably demonstrate:

> The debate in mindreading between the Theory Theory and the Simulation Theory is a debate about the architecture and sub-personal processes responsible for social cognition. Neither account is committed to any view on what phenomenology tells us is going on in our ordinary interactions. With mindreading, there is a process (theorizing or simulating), and there is a product (an explanation or a prediction). In general, neither the process nor the product need be consciously accessible, let alone phenomenologically transparent. (2010, p. 131)

[6] Note, that direct perception and contextreading belong together in many cases. The direct perception of someone's fury can be part of my contextreading. Likewise, I might need to consider the context in order to determine whether another's facial expression is showing disgust or anger.

> What phenomenology can tell us is that our ordinary interactions seem to be based on an immediate, pragmatic, evaluative understanding. However, since the question in the mindreading literature is not about what our ordinary interactions seem to be but about the architecture and sub-personal processes actually responsible for our ordinary interactions, Gallagher's argument does not refute the broad scope of mindreading claim. (ibid., 132)

Spaulding also opposes Gallagher's argument that false belief experiments are designed to test conscious metarepresentational processes (cf. Gallagher, 2001). According to her, these tasks require a "conscious, explicit mode of thinking" (2010, p. 133) which does not address the issue of what is going on at the sub-personal level. She concludes: "If the debate in mindreading is about what is happening at the sub-personal level, then these artificial experiments involving conscious processes are of no help in determining what sub-personal processes are operative" (ibid.). Within the ToM debate, however, the notion of mental state inference was from the very beginning closely tied to exactly those kinds of experiments (see next chapter). To say that they are "of no help" means to neglect what actually constituted the whole debate about mindreading and established what mental state inference is paradigmatically supposed to be. It is true, of course, that these tasks do not help "in determining what sub-personal processes are operative" (ibid., p. 133). But how could the mindreading claim (that we get along socially by mindreading most of the time) ever be falsified if the actual mindreading process is supposed to go on on a sub-personal level that has nothing to do with explicit experiments? And how could we ever identify these sub-personal processes? By better fMRIs that show mental state inferences *in situ*? How should something like an inference, a concept born in our phenomenologically transparent everyday world, ever be observed and identified on a sub-personal level? Spaulding concludes that the mindreading critique "ultimately fails because it does not establish that mindreading occurs only in rare circumstances" (ibid., p. 138) and demands that "it must be established that mindreading does not underlie our ordinary, fully developed social understanding" (ibid., p. 138). Yet since Spaulding resorts to sub-personal realms that are immune to any considerations and observations on the personal, consciously available level, it is relatively easy for representatives of direct perception accounts to turn the tables by demanding that the mindreading account must establish that we engage in mindreading *not* only in rare circumstances. Spaulding is right to emphasize that Gallagher cannot prove that mindreading

occurs only in rare circumstances, but neither can she disprove that direct perception might be going on most of the time.

Gallagher's examples, in refuting extra cognitive steps and detour, reveal a certain degree of similarity to some of the examples cited above by Wittgenstein: "I see my car *as* drivable. This does not mean that I see my car, and then judge that it is drivable" (Gallagher, 2008, p. 537). ToM proponents, however, would simply respond that people see their car as drivable because sub-personal processes provide them the necessary information via sub-personal inference. In a footnote, Gallagher (2008) explicitly deals with potential objections à la Spaulding:

> Does this sub-personal activity involve inference? Inference in some minimal sense involves moving from some known information, which one takes as a clue or as evidence, to something that is not known. First, it is important to note that neurons do not face the world alone. They function only as part of a large and complexly interconnected system. Even a mirror neuron that fires when I see an intentional action (even an incomplete or partially occluded action) is not functioning on its own – it fires only if a variety of other neurons and neuronal systems are working in a certain way. When mirror neuron x fires, it is not just because I see action A, but also because all kinds of neuronal activity is going on, including, of course, activity in the visual cortex, and under conditions defined by a host of other factors, including levels and effects of neurotransmitters. Furthermore, it is misleading to say that the neuron is responding to the action, since the neuron doesn't observe the action. Sub-personal processes do not observe or perceive; and even non-conscious perception is something that the organism as a whole does. On what basis, then, could there be anything like sub-personal inference? (ibid., p. 537)

I cannot resolve the dispute between both parties here. Nevertheless, I think that the picture that Spaulding draws is confusing, to say the least. ToM has become so popular and influenced the scientific community so profoundly that it seems as if its critics have to prove it wrong. What is never really acknowledged is that the burden of proof lies not with the ToM critics who start from the phenomenal level and on that basis deny that we mindread and infer mental states all the time, but with the ToM representatives who still have to show that something like sub-personal or implicit inferences 1) do exist at all and 2) are the ongoing and *causally necessary* processes that enable us to navigate through the social word – especially in

the light of phenomenal experiences that tell a different story, since they are not full of conscious inferences.

I do not want to take sides with Gallagher or Spaulding at this point. Instead, I want to suggest a reasonable way of how to proceed, especially in the light of the ongoing debate between both sides. Notice, that we can, on a phenomenal, experiential level, confirm *all* the competing accounts and aspects mentioned so far. We experience anger *directly* in someone's face, we reason *theoretically*, using *inferences*, about how an absent person might feel or behave given certain information, we put ourselves into another's shoes, i.e. *simulate*, in order to understand better how this person might feel. Sometimes, we directly perceive someone in anger and later report to a friend that this person was angry, i.e., we verbally *attribute* a mental state in reported speech. We experience situations where we make sense of someone's behaviour because we have a look at the *context* or at the *social role* of this person. On a phenomenal level, all this can be confirmed. On a sub-personal level, however, none can.[7] So if the core of ToM and mindreading accounts is the idea that we infer mental states and attribute them to others, then we can either go on arguing that these inferences take place on a sub-personal level all the time, or we can leave this idea aside for the moment. In order to clarify the relationship between an alleged opacity of other minds in Samoa and ToM, the notion of sub-personal mental state inference does not help very much, for even if people do not infer mental states explicitly and are not consciously aware of sometimes doing so, they might still infer mental states on a sub-personal level. The whole idea, brought forward by Robbins and Rumsey (2008), to reflect on ToM on the basis of anthropological observations, suggests to focus on how we come to understand others in phenomenally available ways, simply because anthropological observations are never observations of sub-personal processes.

We have seen that a great deal of our normal social interactions can be explained by direct perception, reliance on social roles and contextreading. Even behaviour prediction as one of the main functions of theory of mind can be alternatively explained in a number of ways, for example by predicting others' behaviour on the basis of personal traits (cf. Andrews, 2008). But according to another critic of the direct perception approach, Mitchell Herschbach, all

[7] One might argue that implicit false belief measures in preverbal infants confirm that something like mental state inference is occuring at the sub-personal level. I will discuss some of these studies in the following chapter on the false belief task. At this point, let me just offer some arguments against this idea. First, it is still an open question how such early false belief measures should be interpreted (cf. Perner & Ruffmann, 2005; Ruffman & Perner, 2005). Second, it is very questionable whether implicit capacities should be *equated* with sub-personal processes. Third, even if sub-personal processes provided something like rules that led infants to make the correct inferences in these non-verbal false belief tasks, it would still be an open question whether sub-personal inferences are constantly at work in the less sophisticated and more common everyday situations.

these alternative routes to understanding do not cover a very specific case which is central to the mindreading account. With reference to ToM-critics like Gallagher, Herschbach says that "the phenomenological critics say little about false beliefs" (2008, p. 41), although he – in line with many other theory of mind researchers - considers false belief understanding to be "a paradigm case of mental state understanding" (ibid., p. 33). In his critique of the phenomenological critics of theory theory and simulation theory accounts, Herschbach (2008) explicitly focuses on false belief understanding. The phenomenological critics propose that we do not have to infer mental states since we perceive emotions and intentions of others in their expressive behaviour, i.e., directly. Herschbach agrees on that, but argues that their alternative conception of social understanding does "not obviously cover the case of false belief" (ibid., p. 41). The sadness in someone's face is, via expression, shared with an observer. The same is true for many kinds of intentional behaviours. In the case of false belief, however, "a person with a false belief has an understanding of the world that is not shared with the observer and cannot be perceived in their current behaviour" (ibid., pp. 41-42). False beliefs "are not currently perceivable, and thus paradigmatic of why we treat mental states as ´inner`, ´hidden` and distinct from observable behaviour" (ibid., p. 48). According to Herschbach, although we can adjust our behaviour depending on what we unreflectively know about other people's beliefs, it remains unsatisfying to call this a purely embodied practice that does not involve mental state attribution or mindreading at all. Herschbach concludes:

> we do not have much empirical evidence at this point about exactly how important false-belief understanding is to our daily lives, or how easy or difficult it is even for adults. But acknowledging all of this does not detract from false-belief understanding's status as a paradigm case of mental state understanding. (ibid., p. 37)

I think Herschbach is right in saying that the ToM-critics' avoidance of the false belief phenomenon is at least unsatisfying. Even if mental state inference is not how we get along socially *all the time*, the false belief phenomenon points to a form of understanding in social situations that cannot easily be explained by the direct perception approach. If false belief understanding is a paradigm case for mental state understanding, then the false belief tasks should be paradigmatic measures or operationalizations of the phenomenon at issue.

The next chapter will critically discuss the false belief task. I will argue that the false belief task will provide us with a paradigmatic case of mental state inference as understood by ToM

representatives. After doing so, we will have all the necessary conceptual tools that will help us to analyze the anthropological reports on the opacity of other minds.

## 2.6 False belief

The false belief tasks is said to provide an example par excellence of mental state attribution and inference that allows for behaviour prediction and explanation. I would even say that the definitions of these terms as they are used in 'mindreading' and theory of mind accounts were never verbally formulated as clearly as they were *operationalized* in the varieties of this task. False belief understanding has generally been considered to be one of the hallmarks of a full-fledged theory of mind and "a so-called ″definitive″ test of mental-state understanding" (Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001, p. 655). Even though theory of mind cannot be limited to false belief understanding, false belief tasks have become the most popular tool to assess the child's theory of mind (Liu, Wellman, Tardif, & Sabbagh, 2008). Performance in these tasks "has come to serve as a marker for mentalistic understanding of persons more generally" (Wellman, Cross & Watson, 2001, p. 656). Wimmer and Perner (1983) came up with the first false belief task in which children were told a story about "Maxi and the chocolate". They had to predict where Maxi with a mistaken belief about the location of some chocolate would look for it, either where he put it himself before leaving the room or where it was moved by his mother when Maxi was absent. While younger children said that Maxi would look in the new location, children around five years of age correctly predicted that Maxi would look for the chocolate where he himself had put it before leaving the room. Numerous studies followed, mainly replicating the original finding that 3-year-old children fail this task while the majority of the 5-year-old children succeed. An influential meta-analysis by Wellman and colleagues (2001) showed that the false belief performance of children from different countries similarly increased from below- to above-chance during the preschool years. In spite of its popularity, the history of false belief research is only slightly longer than the history of its critique. Bloom and German (2000) correctly stated that there is more to a ToM than understanding false belief and that passing the false belief task requires other abilities than ToM like for example inhibitory control (for a further recent critique see also De Haan, Jaegher, Fuchs & Mayer, 2011). Nevertheless, I think Herschbach is right in pointing out that these tasks assess *something* – and it is something that cannot be explained without an understanding of the fact that other people can be misinformed, that they can have a perspective on the world that differs from my own *and* from what is the case in reality.

On the following pages, I will argue that there are presently three important types of false belief tasks that should be distinguished. Older false belief tasks require the child to answer explicit questions about where another person will look for something or what another person will say, i.e., they involve making explicit verbal predictions. I will call these classical false belief tasks *explicit verbal prediction* tasks. More recent paradigms are mainly non-verbal[8] and the role of children in these tasks is more participatory. Children observe an experimenter who acts, requires or asks for something and who is holding a false belief in the critical condition. Children have to give a behavioural response that might consist in helping the experimenter to get a desired object, for example. In these tasks, predictions are not necessary, but children have to make sense of another person's current behaviour and infer what his intention actually is (cf. Buttelmann, Carpenter & Tomasello, 2009). I will call these taks *active behavioural response in interaction* tasks. The third type involves implicit measures and eye measurement technology. These paradigms are non-verbal and do not require children to act, i.e. they are non-behavioural as well.[9] I will refer to these tasks as *looking behaviour* tasks. Whereas classical *explicit verbal prediction* tasks are usually passed with 5 years of age (Wellman, Cross & Watson, 2001), studies that used the other two task types claimed false belief understanding at much younger ages, for example at 13 months (Surian, Caldi & Sperber, 2007) or 18 months of age (Buttelmann et al., 2009). The difference in performance between explicit verbal prediction tasks and the other two types of tasks suggests that the different paradigms might not measure exactly the same ability. In discussing the different types of false belief tasks, I will argue that mental state inference does always involve mental state attribution. At the end of this chapter, I will try to answer the question why false belief understanding is considered to be a paradigm case of mental state understanding. Finally, I will present the conceptual tool kit developed in this chapter with short definitions of the different terms.

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[8] These tasks are non-verbal in the sense that children do not have to give a verbal answer. However, the experimenter might give her instructions verbally, she might comment on her actions verbally to make them more salient or in order to construct the necessary experimental narrative, and even the final prompt that is followed by the children's behavioural response might be given to children verbally. Nevertheless, the children themselves respond by giving, pointing, helping, getting something for the experimenter, etc. In this sense, they are non-verbal as compared to the classical *explicit verbal prediction* tasks.

[9] One might argue that eye movements are a kind of behaviour as well. Yet since looking behaviour tasks are considered to measure implicit false belief understanding, the corresponding eye movements might at best be thought of as a kind of passive behaviour. For the purpose of the present chapter, however, it should be obvious that the kind of response necessary in the *active behavioural response in interaction* tasks is very different from the response children are giving in the implicit tasks. Therefore, I will go on calling the former behavioural and the latter non-behavioural.

### *2.6.1 Explicit verbal prediction tasks*

A first and most famous example for this type of false belief task has already been described above in the story about "Maxi and the chocolate". Such paradigms are also referred to as unexpected transfer or change-of-location tasks, since it is the change of location of an object that induces a false belief in a story character or person whose following behaviour must be predicted.[10] Children are consequently asked where the story character or person (usually another experimenter or assistant) will look for something he has hidden when coming back into the room. Children who pass this task correctly state that he will look for the thing where he has put it before leaving the room, not where the object presently is, since he cannot know this. Note, however, that where the other person will look is not directly perceivable. When children are asked the test question, the other person is still absent. Moreover, the context does not directly provide an answer. Although we can engage in contextreading, this alone will not suffice. Note, that in the case of chess, as argued in the previous chapter, boardreading is sufficient to plan the next move. In the case of the false belief task, things are more complicated. Let's have a look at another famous example, the so-called *Sally-Anne task* (Baron-Cohen, Leslie & Frith, 1985). In this task, dolls (Sally and Anne) are used to enact the false belief story. The child observes Sally put a marble in a basket and then leave the room. While Sally is absent, Anne moves the marble from the basket into a box which is in the same room. Sally then comes back into the room and the child is asked where Sally will look for the marble, and children who understand false beliefs will correctly answer that Sally will look in the basket since she still thinks that it is there. In this example, contextreading provides us with the following information:

1.) Sally hides a marble in the basket
2.) Sally leaves the room
3.) the marble is moved to the box while Sally is still outside
4.) Sally re-enters the room
5.) the test question provides the information that Sally is going to look for the marble

[10] Besides unexpected transfer tasks, *unexpected contents tasks* do also belong to the explicit verbal prediction type. In these tasks, children are typically shown a container with a typical content and asked to say what is inside. After showing them the unexpected content, children are asked what one of their friends will think is in the box (cf. Hogrefe, Wimmer & Perner, 1986). For lack of space and because unexpected contents tasks do not add anything of importance for my following arguments, I will merely focus on unexpected transfer tasks.

Note that the correct answer to the test question is not simply contained in points 1-5, since we need some kind of understanding what "being absent while an object is moved to another location" actually *implies*. At the very least, we have to understand that – in the context of this example - Sally cannot know something she hasn't seen. Moreover, we must understand that people memorize things and search for things where they remember them to be. This knowledge is not directly perceivable, it is not contained in points 1-5. That Sally will look under location A is not fully implied in the fact that the marble was moved from the basket to the box in Sally's absence. It is a behaviour that must be inferred. When Sally re-enters the room, children are asked where she will look for the marble. At this point, children must think something like "Since Sally hasn't seen that the marble was moved into the box, she still thinks that it is in the basket" or "Since Sally was absent while the marble was moved, she still remembers the marble to be in the basket". Such a reasoning structure is justifiably called a mental state inference, since a *non-observable* mental state (what Sally thinks or remembers) is inferred on the basis of a certain course of events one attended to. That Sally might still believe the marble to be in the basket is something we infer *in addition to the perceptually given*.[11] On the basis of the inference that Sally still thinks that the marble is in the basket, they can make another inference which infers Sally's behaviour that she will look for the marble in the basket. Passing this task would therefore require two steps:

1.) mental state inference (what does Sally think or remember)
2.) behaviour inference (where will Sally look for the marble)

Herschbach says that both theory-theory and simulation-theory take success in such tasks "to be the result of mental state attribution" (2008, p. 37). In the analysis above, two inferences were identified. Where is the mental state attribution considered by Herschbach to be involved in those tasks? Does the fact that Herschbach uses the term mental state attribution provide us with another example of how mental state inference and attribution are

[11] Although I cannot go into details here, I have to address two possible alternative explanations. First, children might pass the Sally-Anne task without inferring a mental state by simply attributing ignorance to Sally and by following the rule that people who are ignorant get it wrong. Such a more parsimonious interpretation could indeed be an alternative in this case, but studies which controlled for such an alternative explanation rather supported the view that children really attribute false beliefs – and not only ignorance - to others (Southgate, Senju, & Csibra, 2007). Second, Sally might also pass the task by sticking to the simple behavioural rule that people tend to look for things where they last saw them. Behavioural rules can always be evoked as alternative explanations. They must, however, be adjusted to the situations they have to explain *ex post*. In the case of the false belief task, many different behavioural rules would be required to explain the different forms of false belief tasks. A mentalistic interpretation appears to be more parsimonious (cf. Call & Tomasello, 2008). Moreover,

confounded? Correct performance in the Sally-Anne task cannot be explained by merely referring to mental state *attribution*, since it remains an open question how children know that they have to attribute a false belief to Sally. Note however, that the inferences sketched above ("Since Sally hasn't seen that the marble was moved into the box, she still thinks that it is in the basket" or "Since Sally was absent while the marble was moved, she still remembers the marble to be in the basket") do already contain a mental state attribution, namely "she still thinks that…" and "she still remembers…". It seems as if one cannot think of mental state inferences without someone in mind *whose* mental states are inferred. If I infer that Sally cannot know that the marble moved and that she still remembers it to be in the basket, these inferred facts do already contain the information that all this is about Sally. I do not infer a false belief which must subsequently be attributed to Sally in a second step. One might argue, however, that the first inference is computed on an abstract, general level ("People who haven't seen that an object was moved to another place still think that the object is in the place it was before"). In the case of the Sally-Anne task, this would result in three steps:

1.) mental state inference (what people who haven't seen something think or remember)
2.) mental state attribution (the resulting mental state of the first general inference must now be attributed to a concrete case, i.e. Sally)
3.) behaviour inference (where will Sally look for the marble)

Note, however, that the first inference does also already contain a mental state attribution, although a general one (what *people* think or remember). Therefore, I suggest to stick to the first analysis that only requires two steps, since mental state inference and attribution appear to coincide in the case of the false belief task. Notably, mental state inferences cannot be computed without someone (a concrete person or persons in general) in mind whose mental state must be inferred. More to the point, there is mental state attribution without inference, but no mental state inference without attribution. This might also explain why both terms are used interchangeably by many researchers and why some definitions of ToM or mindreading use only one of both terms. Nevertheless, there are still good reasons to distinguish between both terms (see previous chapter).

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first empirical studies that controlled for a "People look for objects where they last saw them" - rule rather support the mentalistic interpretation (Träuble, Marinovic & Pauen, 2010).

### *2.6.2 Active behavioural response in interaction tasks*

In these tasks, participants must interpret the speech or actions of an interactional partner, usually the experimenter, in light of his false belief in order to give the correct response. The required response in these tasks is active and behavioural, i.e., non-verbal. With respect to such tasks, Herschbach states:

> Participants are not being asked to make reflective judgments about the other person's mental states, or to explicitly predict or explain their behaviour. Rather, false-belief understanding is required to successfully navigate the interaction, to respond online to the other person's verbal request. (2008, p. 46)

Studies that used this type of false belief task were done by Carpenter, Call and Tomasello (2002), Buttelmann et al. (2009) or recently by Southgate, Chevallier, and Csibra (2010). Since the latter study will be of importance in the empirical part of this work, I will have a closer look at it in the present chapter as well.

In this study, an experimenter placed two novel, unnamed objects in two boxes of different colour. In the false belief condition, he leaves the room after doing so. Then, a second experimenter appears from behind a curtain and switches the objects in a sneaky way before disappearing behind the curtain again. When the first experimenter re-enters the room, he points to one of the two closed boxes and asks the child to get the intended object for him. Infants as young as 17 months seem to understand that the experimenter actually intends the object in the non-referred box. In the true belief condition, in contrast, they interpret his pointing behaviour as actually referring to the referred box, since the experimenter has seen the exchange of the objects in this condition.

In the true belief condition, contextreading would give us the following information:

1.) Experimenter 1 places two objects in two boxes
2.) Experimenter 2 appears and removes the objects from the boxes
3.) Experimenter 1 watches how Experimenter 2 swaps them
4.) Experimenter 2 disappears again
5.) Experimenter 1 points to one of the boxes, asking for help

Children subsequently help the adult by giving him the object out of the box he is actually pointing at. No mental state inference is required for that. Children see an adult pointing to a box and give him the object inside.

In the false belief condition, contextreading would give us the following information:

1.) Experimenter 1 places two objects in two boxes
2.) Experimenter 1 leaves the room
3.) Experimenter 2 appears and swaps the objects while Experimenter 1 is absent
4.) Experimenter 2 disappears again
5.) Experimenter 1 re-enters the room
6.) Experimenter 1 points to one of the boxes, asking for help

Children subsequently help the adult by giving him the object out of the box he is *not* pointing at. For doing so, children somehow have to interpret the adults pointing gesture as actually referring to the other box, although the perceptual evidence does not give them any reason for doing so. The reason for opening the other box must therefore be an inferred one, children have to think something like "Since he hasn't seen that the objects were swapped, he still thinks that object 1 is in the box he is pointing at".

Again, although there is no prediction involved here, children in this type of false belief task have to infer a non-observable mental state on the basis of something that was directly perceived in a very similar way than in the explicit verbal prediction task. And like in the explicit verbal prediction task, the mental state inference does already contain mental state attribution. According to Southgate and colleagues, their results "demonstrate that 17-month-old infants are able to attribute beliefs to others, and that they can use this ability to assign reference in a communicative context" (2010, pp. 910-911). Like Herschbach with respect to the explicit verbal prediction tasks, Southgate and colleagues interpret their findings as involving mental state attribution and do neither say anything about the inference which makes this attribution possible nor about the underlying knowledge that allows for the correct inference (that people can hold a false belief).

### *2.6.3 Looking behaviour tasks*

Onishi and Baillargeon (2005) used a violation-of-expectation paradigm to demonstrate false belief understanding in 15-month-old infants. Infants were familiarized with a scene in which

an agent hides a toy in one of two locations and later returns to retrieve the object from the location where he hid it. Infants were then shown scenes where the toy was moved without the agent's knowledge. They saw one out of two situations. Either the agent looked for the toy where he falsely believed it to be or where the toy was actually located (although the agent could not know this). The fact that infants looked longer in the latter case was interpreted by the authors as a sign that their expectation was violated – and the very fact that infants seemed to expect the agent to act in accordance with his false belief was interpreted as an early, implicit form of false belief understanding. However, some researchers have argued that the attribution of false beliefs is not the only explanation that can account for the longer looking times. Children might use associations between actor, object, and location (Perner & Ruffman, 2005) or they might simply attribute ignorance to the agent instead of false belief (cf. Southgate, Senju & Csibra, 2007).

A more convincing study using an anticipatory looking paradigm was done by Clements and Perner (1994) and more recently by Southgate and colleagues (2007). These studies are not very different from traditional tasks like the Sally-Anne task – however, children do not have to give a verbal answer. Instead, their anticipatory looking is examined using eye-tracking technology. In the study of Southgate and colleagues, infants are first familiarized with a video of an agent who watches how a ball is hidden by a puppet in one of two boxes. Windows through which the agent reaches for the boxes are then illuminated and the actor reaches for the box containing the ball. The test trial consists of two false belief conditions. In the first condition, the puppet initially places the ball in the left box. Then, the puppet moves it to the right box and then goes back to the left one to close its lid. Then, the actor turns round (i.e., from now on he cannot see what is going on) and the puppet removes the ball from the scene. After that, the actor turns back and the windows are illuminated (which signals that he will reach for one of the two boxes in order to retrieve the ball). In the second false belief condition, the puppet again places the ball in the left box. Then, the actor turns round before the puppet moves the ball from the left box to the right one. After doing so, the puppet removes the ball from the scene. Then, the actor turns back and the windows are illuminated again. While children in the first false belief condition correctly gaze to the right window significantly more often than to the left window, children in the second false belief condition gaze more often to the left window. According to the authors, this pattern "cannot be explained by the use of simpler rules, such as looking toward the first or last position of the object, the last position the actor attended, or the last location the puppet acted on" (ibid., pp. 590-591) and take their results as evidence "that 2-year-olds are able to attribute false beliefs"

(ibid., p. 591). Again, the authors interpret their findings as involving mental state attribution and do neither say anything about the inference which makes this attribution possible nor about the underlying knowledge that allows for the correct inference (that people can hold a false belief). If the reasoning-process in this task is comparable to the one described in the Sally-Anne task analysis, then the inference involved is also comparable.

Whether looking behaviour tasks actually measure the same as explicit verbal prediction or active behavioural response in interaction tasks, is an open question (see for example Buttelmann et al., 2009; Perner & Ruffman, 2005). For the purpose of this work, the first two types of false belief tasks seem to be more interesting. Explicit verbal prediction tasks are usually not passed before five years of age, i.e. at an age where children have already been strongly influenced by cultural rules and norms as well as local epistemologies, or, in the case of the present work, alleged opacity doctrines. Although children pass active behavioural response in interaction tasks much earlier, they still have to give an active behavioural response. Such a response is not given out of a cultural vacuum: even at very young age, children's behavioural responses might already be guided by what is culturally expected and appropriate. From this point of view, the more passive looking behaviour tasks appear to be less appropriate when it comes to investigating the relationship between the possible influence of opacity doctrines on the constitutive aspects of mindreading.

## 2.7 How properties of the false belief task influence our theorizing

After summarizing and analyzing various types of false belief tasks, let me ask the following question again: Why is false belief understanding considered to be a paradigmatic example of mental state understanding? Is it really *the* paradigmatic example for our ability to explain and predict behaviour by attributing and inferring mental states? If people gossip about someone who insulted and attacked his neighbour although he is usually known for his peaceful character, they might infer that he must have been very angry and that he will probably try to avoid meeting the neighbour in the following days. In this example, the gossipers infer a mental state on the basis of behaviour that is usually associated with anger. In doing so, they also attribute anger, since I have argued that mental state inference cannot be thought of without mental state attribution. Moreover, they explain his behaviour by reference to a mental state and they also predict his probable behaviour on the basis of the attributed mental state. So what is so special about the false belief task? And why do ToM critics like Shaun Gallagher (2008), Daniel Hutto (2008) or Leudar and Costall (2009a) oppose theory of mind when ToM is simply about this: attributing and inferring mental states for behaviour

explanation and prediction? After all, they would probably have a hard time denying that all this occurs in the example just given.

Let me clarify this by making two points. First, I will argue that the false belief task is actually about *more* than what is constitutive of theory of mind or mindreading in corresponding definitions. Second, I will argue that theory of mind research was tied so closely to the false belief task that aspects of laboratory experiments in general influenced the theories that were derived on the basis of false belief results. I will start with the first point. Although inferential abilities are necessary for passing the false belief task, it is not primarily measuring inference *per se*. Rather, the false belief task assesses whether children have the necessary knowledge *on which basis* the correct inference can be made, namely, that people who don't see a change-of-location still think that an object is in the previous location. It is this knowledge that allows for the correct inference. Therefore, passing the false belief task requires among other things (like for example inhibitory control) not only reasoning abilities that allow for inference in general (cf. Frye, Zelazo & Palfai, 1995, p. 524; Riggs & Peterson, 2000; Riggs, Peterson, Robinson & Mitchell, 1998), they require the understanding that people in such a situation cannot know about things they haven't seen and that they act on the basis of what they *think* is the case. But this insight challenges the link between definitions of theory of mind and 'mindreading' on the one hand and the alleged paradigmatic test designed for its measurement on the other, since the false belief task clearly tests more than the ability to explain and predict behaviour on the basis of mental state attributions and inferences. What is additionally assessed in false belief tasks is an understanding which we only need very rarely, and even in situations in which we have to explain and predict behaviour by attributing and inferring mental states (e.g. the peaceful guy's outburst we heard of in gossip), it is an understanding we mostly do not need. However, the false belief task somehow redefined what it was supposed to measure. Reddy and Morris (2004) observed that there is "a peculiar redefinitional tendency in the process of building a scientific paradigm, in which the theory not only defines its own investigative remit but also usurps common meanings and thus redefines its evidence" (ibid., p. 655). Although ToM definitions speak about mental state inference and mental state attribution for the purpose of behaviour prediction and explanation, they measure all this with a task that requires more, namely, an understanding that people can be misinformed about the true state of affairs and that such misinformation can guide behaviour. This additional "more" subsequently put more common examples from everyday life in question. What about our gossipers, who concluded that this formerly peaceful guy must have been really angry? Inferring anger in this example might be the result of a simple

association between specific behaviours and a mental state term (anger), and providing anger as a reason for aggressive behaviour might be a learnt narrative competence. Since such a kind of mental state inference does not involve an understanding that people can be misinformed and hold a false belief, it is not considered to be a "true" example of theory of mind, although theory of mind is *defined* as the ability to infer mental states for behaviour explanation. This is precisely the "peculiar redefinitional tendency" Reddy and Morris criticized. All of a sudden, our everyday interactions and experiences are not good enough for demonstrating that someone understands other minds as another perspective on the world. And according to Leudar and Costall (2009b), "the basic conviction has remained that it is only on the basis of experimental evidence that we can determine whether a particular individual is *really* able to understand other people" (ibid., p. 7).

Let's come to the second point. False belief tasks are tied to laboratory settings in which other influencing factors are controlled. Pillow, Hill, Boyce and Stein (2000) distinguish both perceptual experience as well as guessing from inference and confirm that inferences "provide knowledge of events that have not been directly perceived" (ibid., p. 170). What I think is most telling is how they distinguish inference from guessing: "Inferences and guesses both involve cognitive activities; however, inferences are based on the integration of premise information rather than on random generation of ideas in the absence of information. Furthermore, valid deductive inferences yield certain knowledge, but guesses are uncertain" (ibid., p. 170). Transferred to the domain of mental states, this would imply that the term mindguessing should be used for guesses that are not based on any evidence and that are uncertain while mental state inferences are based on given information and yield certain knowledge. I will come back to this point in a moment.

In the experiment of Pillow and colleagues, children between 4 and 7 years of age had to rate the certainty of a puppet's belief about a hidden toy as well as to explain the origin of this belief. Both the puppet and the child saw two toys of different colour. Afterwards, the toys were hidden in two separate containers. In the first condition (perception condition), the puppet looked into one of the containers and made a statement about the colour of the toy inside. In the second condition (inference condition), the puppet looked into one of the containers but made a statement about the colour of the toy in the other container. In the third condition (guess condition), the puppet made a statement about the colour of a toy in one of both containers without looking into either of them before. Note, that the operationalization of the guess condition is not in line with the definition of guesses given above. In this condition, children see the two objects before they are hidden. Therefore, the odds of guessing correctly

are fifty-fifty. Guessing, at least in its operationalization by Pillow and colleagues, is therefore far from being a "random generation of ideas in the absence of information" (ibid., p. 170).

The authors "expected children to rate the puppet as highly certain when its statement appeared to be based on direct perceptual experience or deductive inference but to rate the puppet as uncertain when the statement appeared to be a guess" (ibid.). In a second experiment, another condition was introduced, a so-called invalid inference trial. In this condition, the puppet looked into one of three cans (each containing an object of different colour) and made a statement about the colour of an object in one of the other two containers. In this condition, looking into only one can does not allow to deduce the colour of the object in one of the other cans (cf. Pillow, Hill, Boyce & Stein, 2000). What is interesting here is how the inference condition – in contrast to the invalid inference trial - is operationalized as the condition where there is only *one correct answer*. The authors say that "deductive inferences are more certain than guesses" (ibid., p. 170), but in operationalizing a study on inference so that there is only one correct answer, they automatically create the impression that inferences can yield *certain* knowledge. And here is my argument: false belief researchers did exactly the same and so the last thirty years of false belief research gave rise to exactly such an impression. I have argued that behaviour explanation and prediction by means of mental state attribution and inference *can* occur in everyday life. But almost never in everyday life can we know for *certain* whether our inferences are correct. As soon as there is more than one possibility, Pillow and colleagues would speak of an invalid inference. In these cases, *mindguessing* would probably be the more appropriate term.

Imagine that you are having a coffee with a friend - let's call him Michael. Michael is obviously very sad and strikes his chin thoughtfully. Another friend told you the day before that Michael's girlfriend has left him. Consequently, you might infer that he is currently thinking of his girlfriend. Now how certain are you that he is thinking of his girlfriend? Your inference was based on your background knowledge that his girlfriend has left him and on the direct perception of his sadness and thoughtful expression. To assume that Michael is thinking of her is therefore reasonable. However, Michael's thinking might be occupied with something else as well. Although the sad mood he is in originates in the fact that his girlfriend has left him, this mood could have started a whole bunch of other negative feelings and thoughts. Instead of thinking of his ex-girlfriend, he might as well think of another girlfriend who left him many years ago, how his first love rejected him in school, he might remember the divorce of his parents or think whether he should ask the beautiful waitress in his favourite café to go out for a drink with him. Actually, these alternatives are not very improbable.

Saying that we infer a mental state in such situations obscures how fallible they are in everyday life and how much certainty depends on the other's confirmation. Rather than speaking of mental state inference, we make a probable guess based on available evidence. In other words, we engage in *mindguessing*, although we use given information and background knowledge to make the guess as good as possible. The term "inference" has its place in mathematics and the natural sciences, but not in everyday social encounters. The same is true for terms like "prediction" and "explanation". With respect to the latter, Hutto says that "proper reason explanations require us to designate *the* reason for acting – as opposed to simply offering a possible reason for acting" (2004, p. 570). Explaining, predicting and inferring all sound as if there is one correct answer, as if the possibility of gaining *certain and exact* knowledge about another's mental states is real. As we have seen, all these terms are constitutive for definitions of 'mindreading' – and 'mindreading', due to its relatedness to the notion of telepathy, is itself a term which suggests that certain knowledge about others' mental states is easily possible. However, explaining something is not the same as providing possible reasons for a behaviour. When we move from everyday life to the artificial world of the laboratory, we reduce the contingency of everyday life, we reduce the endless possibilities that our mindguessing activities in everyday life face to a binary setting with one wrong and one correct answer which can unequivocally be inferred. In doing so, we give rise to an *illusion of inference*, an *illusion* of explanation and prediction. In speaking of an illusion, I do not want to say that we do not infer, explain and predict in the laboratory – the illusion is generated when we take for granted that what is at work in the laboratory is also pervasive outside of it, when we assume that the preciseness and unambiguousness of the laboratory – reflected in a corresponding terminology that speaks of inference, explanation and prediction – should shape our theories of how we come to understand others.

One might ask, however, why we shouldn't use the term mental state inference in a weaker sense, for example in the same way as I used it above in the example of the peaceful guy who surprisingly attacked someone. I said that people in gossip infer that he must have been very angry on the basis that such behaviour is usually associated with anger. Indeed, given information is used to arrive at a plausible conclusion, so why not talk of mental state inference? I think there is no stringent reason to avoid the term in such cases. However, I have tried to demonstrate how researchers think of inferences as processes that yield *certain* knowledge. This is why I prefer the term mindguessing. But let me suggest a possible solution. We could think of pure mindguessing and false belief understanding as two poles of one continuum. On the very left, mindguessing occurs without any premise information. On

the right pole, we have the artificial situation of a false belief laboratory experiment with only two possible and only one correct answer. The more we move from the left to the right, the more premise information via contextreading is given, and the chances to guess correctly become higher. As soon as there is at least some information available on which we can base our guesses, we could also talk of mental state inference. As we move from the left to the right, mindguessing gradually loses its guessing character and, since more and more information is provided, we gain the impression that we might infer another's mental state with certainty, false belief situations being the extreme example. In this view, mental state inference is the process which we use at all points of the continuum except for cases of pure mindguessing. But in order to avoid the illusion of inference as a deduction that yields certain knowledge, I suggest to use the term mindguessing for all those cases where the inference is not more than a probable guess based on available evidence.

### 2.8 Summary

Let us sum up. In this chapter, I have criticized the notion of mindreading and suggested to use the terms mental state inference and mental state attribution instead. I have further argued that both terms should be distinguished although they often go hand in hand. A short introduction to the direct perception approach of mental states was given and I have introduced new terms like contextreading and mindguessing. Finally, I have tried to argue that the term mental state inference gives rise to the illusion of certainty, which is why I introduced the term mindguessing. The first part of the conceptual tool kit that will be necessary for the analysis of the opacity reports is therefore ready for use. It will be summarized now by presenting the corresponding definitions before I turn to the next chapter on empathy.

**Contextreading:** the ability to make sense of situations, circumstances and the course of events without the necessity to infer mental states, for example by considering rules or norms
**Direct perception:** will be used to refer to the direct perception of certain mental states, for example intentions that can be read off behaviours or mood and emotions that can be perceived in someone's facial and corporal expression as well as in gestures; no inferences are involved
**Mental state attribution:** ascribing silently or aloud a mental state term to either an animate or inanimate being, for example when labelling something which is directly perceived

**Mental state talk:** talk and narrative that involves mental state attribution, either in interactive situations or inner soliloquy

**Mindguessing:** guessing the content of someone's mind, either without evidence or on the basis of given evidence that still leaves alternative possibilities open

**Mental state inference:** a reasoning process in which non-observable mental states are inferred on the basis of given information, involved in mindguessing as soon as guesses are based on evidence as well as in false belief understanding

**False belief understanding:** the ability to base mental state inferences on the knowledge that people might falsely believe something to be the case and act on the basis of this belief

# 3. Empathy

In the introduction, I argued that the opacity of other minds phenomenon is at least as much about empathy as it is about 'mindreading'-practices across cultures. In a stepwise process, I will start to critically review current definitions and conceptualizations of empathy and develop a definition of empathy on theoretical grounds. This definition will be enriched by emic concepts reported in the anthropological contributions on empathy (see next chapter) and by additional aspects of Jeannette Mageo's (2011) account on empathy in Samoa. In this chapter, I will start with a short paragraph on the history of the term before I go on to outline the conceptual difficulties of the term. After this, I will argue that grasping the 'how'-aspect of another's experience is a central aspect of empathy in my view. Finally, I will provide a first definition of empathy.

## 3.1 Historical background of a modern concept

The term empathy was coined by Edward Titchener (1909) who introduced it into English as a translation of the German term *Einfühlung* (literally: "feeling into"; Lipps, 1903, 1906). It was originally introduced in the field of aesthetic perception (cf. Vischer, 1927). Vischer called the imaginary shift into another object *Einfühlung*.[12] Lipps (1906) understood the term in a much broader sense, although he confirmed that we anthropomorphize objects and things via *Einfühlung*.[13] For Lipps, *Einfühlung* also provides us with knowledge of other consciousnesses ("Wissen von fremdem Bewußtseinsleben"; 1906, p. 35) via a kind of inner participation ("inneres Mitmachen") or imitation of observed expressive behaviour (Lipps, 1903, p. 111). Indeed, *Einfühlung*, in Lipps view, *is* this kind of inner participation.[14] Lipps argued that seeing a foreign gesture or expression results in a tendency to reproduce it, which

[12] In Vischer's words: "Betrachte ich einen ruhigen, festen Gegenstand, so kann ich mich ganz folgsam an die Stelle seines inneren Aufbaus, seines Schwerpunktes setzen. Ich bilde mich demselben ein, vermittle meinen Umfang mit dem seinigen, strecke und erweitere, biege und beschränke mich in demselben" (1927, p. 21). In another place, Vischer says about the inner sense which is thereby at work that it "fühlt an der Form auch ihre Fülle. Er umfaßt z. B. einen Baum, versetzt sich in seine holzige Triebkraft und fühlt, zurückkehrend, seinen Formcharakter von innen heraus; starrt, sproßt und schwankt in ihm, tastet in seinen Spitzen. Er brüstet und bäumt sich in der Woge. Er ballt sich dumpf in der Wolke. Für diese Art von Versetzung weiß ich kein besseres Wort als: Einfühlung" (1927, p. 63). Here, Vischer describes how *Einfühlung* even allows for feeling into a tree.

[13] "Daß wir trotzdem alle diese Ausdrücke auch auf Dinge anwenden, hat seinen Grund in dem gleichen Umstande, der uns auch von Tätigkeiten der Dinge sprechen läßt, d. h. in einer Vermenschlichung oder Beseelung der Dinge der Außenwelt, kurz in der »Einfühlung«" (Lipps, 1906, p. 28).

[14] "So mache ich denn insbesondere auch das innere Verhalten, das in einer Ausdrucksbewegung für mich unmittelbar liegt, in dem Maße innerlich mit, als dasselbe meinem eigenen Wesen gemäß, oder mir selbst „natürlich" ist, und als ich der Ausdrucksbewegung, und damit zugleich jenem inneren Verhalten, betrachtend hingegeben bin" (Lipps, 1903, p. 111). On the same page, Lipps says: "Dies Mitmachen ist aber Einfühlung""(ibid.).

in turn evokes the feeling normally associated with it. Lipps' model clearly anticipates simulation theory and makes it understandable that empathy has recently become a central category within the simulationist camp (see for example Stueber, 2012). For Lipps, "empathy is a resonance phenomenon or a form of inner or mental imitation activated in the perceptual encounter with another person and his activities" (Stueber, 2012, p. 55). The result of this resonance or inner participation must then be projected onto the other and thus allows understanding him. There is an important difference between Vischer's use of the term *Einfühlung* and Lipps' application of the term for human encounters. On Vischer's account, *Einfühlung* refers to the act of feeling something into an object or piece of art that is not part of the object or artwork itself, since neither objects, nor paintings or novels do have any feelings. Lipps, however, uses the term to refer to processes where we project a feeling into another after a kind of resonance has taken place. One could argue that works of art can also make us resonate. This is certainly true. However, I think nobody would deny that there is a clear difference between both kinds of resonance. Most importantly, whereas our "feeling into" a work of art adds something to it that was formerly not there, our "feeling into" another person is supposed to tell us something *about* this person that is already there, it is supposed to assess something *of* the other, namely, that she is a minded, conscious creature having specific mental states. Whereas *Einfühlung* in Vischers's sense treats something as if it were minded although it is not, Lipps uses the term to describe how we come to understand something as minded which indeed *has* a mind, namely, human beings.

### 3.2 Empathy, ToM, and simulation: on the way to conceptual clarity

Since the times of these authors, things have become more complicated. In their influential article on empathy, Preston and de Waal (2002) state that the concept of empathy "has had a difficult history, marked by disagreement and discrepancy" and that the interdisciplinary research field that investigates empathy "suffers from a lack of consensus regarding the nature of the phenomenon" (ibid., p. 1). Nevertheless, Decety and Ickes are certainly right to claim that "empathy research is suddenly everywhere!" (2009, vii). And, in line with Preston and de Waal, they add that the construct of empathy is "a very complicated one that, from its very introduction, has been used by different writers in very different ways" (ibid., vii). The previous chapter has demonstrated that it is quite difficult to get clear-cut definitions of such terms like theory of mind, mindreading, mental state attribution, or mental state inference. With empathy, however, things are even more complicated, since almost "everybody writing in the field would declare that there is no accepted standard definition of empathy" (Engelen

& Röttger-Rössler, 2012, p. 3). Stueber even says that "the concept of empathy has been characterized by a rather shameful disregard for conceptual clarity" (2012, p. 55). In an attempt to bring some order into the field of empathy research, Batson (2009) recently identified two major research questions that guide this research and eight different uses of the term empathy which refer to different phenomena. According to Batson, the two questions are 1) "How do we know another's thoughts and feelings?" and 2) "What leads one person to respond with sensitivity and care to the suffering of another?" (2009, pp. 8-9). Each of the eight uses of the term empathy identified by Batson can be treated as an attempt to answer one of these two questions. Note, however, that knowledge about what another person thinks and feels can also lead someone to respond with sensitivity and care. Likewise, caring for someone might provide knowledge about what they think and feel. Instead of trying to provide *the* definition for empathy, Batson suggests: "The best one can do is recognize the different phenomena, make clear the labeling scheme one is adopting, and use that scheme consistently" (ibid., p. 8).
The eight concepts as identified by Batson (cf. 2009, pp. 4-8) are:

Concept 1: Knowing another person's internal state, including his or her thoughts and feelings
Concept 2: Adopting the posture or matching the neural responses of an observed other
Concept 3: Coming to feel as another person feels
Concept 4: Intuiting or projecting oneself into another's situation
Concept 5: Imagining how another is thinking and feeling
Concept 6: Imagining how one would think and feel in the other's place
Concept 7: Feeling distress at witnessing another person's suffering
Concept 8: Feeling for another person who is suffering

With respect to concepts 7 and 8, Batson says that they "are not sources of knowledge (or belief) about another's state; they are reactions to this knowledge" (2009, p. 9). The concepts of *pity* and *sympathy* are probably the ones that were most often associated with concept 8. But let's start from the beginning. While concept 1 bears a striking resemblance to ToM, concept 2 refers to processes such as mimicry and imitation. Gallese, for example, thinks of empathy as a form of inner imitation (2003, p. 519). Batsons formulation of concept 3 would be a valid description for emotional contagion (cf. Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994), while it could also be the result of what is covered by concept 2. According to Batson (2009, p. 6), concept 4 refers to the psychological state originally referred to by Lipps (1903, 1906)

as *Einfühlung*. Concept 5 is about those imaginative abilities that focus on the other while concept 6 is rather about imagining to be in the other's place. Batson mentions the similarities between concepts 4, 5, and 6 and goes on to suggest that simulation proponents might consider their approach as involving several of the concepts in this list:

> A simulation theory proponent might argue that by intuiting and projecting oneself into the other's situation (concept 4) or by imagining how one would think and feel in the other's place (concept 6), one comes to feel as the other feels (concept 3), and knowledge of one's own feelings then enables one to know – or to believe one knows – how the other feels (concept 1). (2012, p. 9)

Alternatively, matching (concept 2) might lead one to feel as the other feels (concept 3) and therefore to know his mental state (concept 1). This demonstrates how much influence simulationist ideas have on how empathy is currently conceptualized and understood. From a simulationist point of view, concepts 1-6 are just descriptions of different aspects or steps within a simulation process. After sketching different uses of the term empathy sensu Batson, I will now critically discuss some concrete *definitions* of empathy and try to link them to the concepts identified by Batson. In doing so, I will try to argue for a reasonable definition of empathy in order to be able to add it to the conceptual tool kit with which the anthropological reports in chapter 4 will be analyzed.

Note that there is another distinction running through some of the concepts identified by Batson (concepts 1, 5, 6), namely, the distinction between thoughts and feelings in empathic processes. As a matter of fact, some researchers focus on the affective, emotional side of empathy, others on the more cognitive aspects. This often results in the difficulty to distinguish empathy from the concepts analyzed in the previous chapter on theory of mind and 'mindreading'. Some authors even define empathy or related concepts in the same way theory of mind is usually defined. For example, William Ickes defines *empathic inference* as "the everyday mind reading that people do whenever they attempt to infer other people s thoughts and feelings. It is a concept that other writers address under such headings as 'mentalizing' or 'theory of mind'" (2009, p. 57). Although Ickes speaks of empathic inference and not of empathy, he still explicitly links theory of mind to an empathic process. Inspired by Ickes, Decety and Jackson (2004) define empathy as "a complex form of psychological inference in which observation, memory, knowledge, and reasoning are combined to yield insights into the thoughts and feelings of others" (ibid., p. 73). Remember the analysis of the

Sally-Anne task in the previous chapter. Children have to observe the ongoing events involving Sally and Anne, they have to memorize where the marble previously was and at which location Sally has seen the marble. They have to know that people who do not see things usually do not know any details about them and they have to reason, i.e., infer that Sally will still think that the marble is in the basket. I have argued that this task provides *the* paradigmatic example for the term mental state inference as it is used in the theory of mind framework. But according to the definition of empathy provided by Decety and Jackson, children's success in the Sally-Anne task would also be a paradigmatic example for empathy. Both the definitions of Ickes and Decety and Jackson can clearly be related to concept 1 in Batson's list. If we accept such a usage of the term empathy, we end up having two different labels for one and the same phenomenon. Therefore, I suggest to be very critical of every definition of empathy that sounds too much like mindreading and theory of mind. One might argue, however, that this is not problematic since cognitive and affective empathy are distinguished in some definitions (Walter, 2012). Yet if cognitive empathy amounts to ToM, then we end up with two labels for the same phenomenon again.
Cultural anthropologist Jason Throop summarizes the most important aspects of how some anthropologists dealt with the concept of empathy:

> Common to these views is the idea that empathetic acts are characterized by at least three distinct moments: (1) a decentering of the self from its own historically and culturally situated self-experience; (2) imagining the perspective of another from a quasi-first-person perspective; and (3) approximating the feelings, emotions, motives, concerns, and thoughts of another mind. (2008, p. 405)

The second point here is equivalent to Batson's concept 6, the third comes close to concept 3.
I have already mentioned that simulationist ideas figure prominently in many definitions of empathy. Throop's second point, which sounds like an exemplary characterization of what simulation theory is all about, clearly proves that. A closer look, however, reveals that actually all three points make reference to simulation theory since they belong together logically. A decentering of the self is actually the precondition for the ability to imagine oneself in another's shoes and point three just states the goal of simulation processes: we decenter and imagine another's perspective because we aim to approximate his feelings, emotions, etc. Does empathy then amount to simulation? Has simulation theory become our theory of empathy? Authors like Stueber admit that their "account of empathy is closely

linked to contemporary simulation theory" (2012, p. 56). Moreover, I have pointed out that concepts 1-6 in Batson's list could easily be reframed as a description of simulation processes. The same is true for the three distinct moments of empathic acts sensu Throop. With regard to simulation theory, Sharrock and Coulter (2009) say: "No one is denying that we can sometimes imaginatively simulate a situation and our reaction to it, but ST is advanced as a generalized account of how we understand others and requires, therefore, that we be simulating pretty much all the time" (2009, p. 80). Simulation theory (ST) was put forward as a theoretical account of how we understand others as having minds in general – and I think this is where we should be cautious, since simulation would, from this point of view, be necessary to know that others are minded at all. Moreover, we would have to simulate anger in ourselves in order to know that another person is angry. Simulation thus conceived shares with other ToM approaches the basic assumption that other people's minds are hidden away from each other, that there is a gap that must be bridged somehow, and that expressive behaviour alone cannot tell us something about the other's mental state (see previous chapter). Sharrock and Coulter critically remark: "It is sometimes suggested that ST has affinity with the vernacular request to put ourselves in another person's shoes, though ST itself is rather more a case of putting other people in our shoes" (2009, p. 84). So is there a possibility to think of empathy as a form of perspective taking that does not buy into the basic assumption of the hiddenness of other minds?

I think the picture we have arrived at so far is unsatisfying. If empathy research is currently experiencing a revival, then there should be more to it than the present analysis suggests. Note that we would intuitively, based on our naïve everyday understanding of the term, never equate theory of mind (concept 1) with empathy, nor would we equate it with mimickry and imitation (concept 2), with emotional contagion (concept 3), personal distress (concept 7) or pity and sympathy (concept 8). Moreover, we have seen that concepts 4 and 6 and the definitions of empathy presented above do not offer very much that goes beyond theory of mind or what simulation theories have to offer – and simulation theory in its original form is just another account within the theory of mind framework. But even if we accepted to identify empathy with simulation, we would again end up having two terms for the same phenomenon.

### 3.3 Grasping the 'how'-aspect of others' experience

Before I try to develop a conception of empathy that is hopefully more satisfying and not identical with simulation theory, let me start with asking a question that might sound heretical: Do we need the concept of empathy at all? Imagine you are on a party, it is late and

you see someone you like but do not know very well – let us call him Donald – sitting on the sofa. You want to say hello and, while approaching the sofa, you directly perceive the sadness in his face. You stop in front of him and, since you don't know what the reason for his sadness might be, you start to talk a bit with him. He tells you that his girlfried has left one hour ago with another guy while he was spending some time on the toilet because he felt sick. Donald shows you a photograph he secretly made with his iPhone before going to the toilet. It shows his girlfriend talking with that other guy, on the photo both appear to have fun. You read the context – what Donald told you and what you see on the photograph – and you infer that Donald probably thinks that his girlfriend is cheating on him. You go to get a drink and meet someone at the bar who tells you that Donald's girlfried thought *he* had already left, that she was angry because Donald didn't tell her and that she finally agreed to leave with someone who dropped her at her home and then went on to his girlfriend. You infer that Donald is holding a false belief and that he is sad because he falsely believes his girlfriend to cheat on him while she is probably lying in bed, angry with him because she falsely believes that Donald left without telling her, while he was waiting on the toilet for his sickness to pass.

In this example, you can understand a very complex social situation by direct perception, contextreading, mental state- and false belief inference. Direct perception provides you with an answer to the *what*-question: Donald is sad. Contextreading helps you to infer that Donald might think that his girlfried is cheating on him and false belief inference answers the *why*-question, since it lets you understand that Donald is sad because he falsely beliefs his girlfriend to cheat on him. It seems as if we already have everything we need to analyze social situations and interactions in our conceptual tool kit. But all this is knowledge that keeps us in the position of a distant observer, it does neither help us to understand *how* Donald feels, nor how *Donald* feels, as long as we are not somehow drawn ever more deeply into his personal experience. In short, while the conceptual tools developed in the previous chapter can help us to understand *what* another person feels and *why* this is so, we do still not have a real idea of *how* this person feels – and this is where I think empathy comes into play. Of course, in a minimal sense, perceiving someone's sadness gives us an idea *how* this person feels, since we all now what it means to be sad. Yet as long as we do not *share* the other's emotion, this minimal understanding of the '*how*-aspect' is rather abstract and conceptually guided. It remains 'cold' and does not necessarily bring us in closer contact with the other. Engelen and Röttger-Rössler appear to have the same intuition: "Empathy is a social feeling that consists in feelingly grasping or retracing the present, future, or past emotional state of the other; thus, empathy is also called a vicarious emotion" (2012, p. 4). Interesting in this definition is that

emotional states are not only the object of empathy, the *process* of empathy itself is a "feelingly grasping". The definition of Bischof-Köhler goes into the same direction: "Empathy is a process in which an observer vicariously shares the emotion or intention of another person and thereby understands what this other person feels or intends" (2012, p. 41). Whereas Röttger-Rössler talks of "feelingly grasping", Bischof-Köhler even speaks of sharing (ibid.). As argued above, I think that sharing is an important aspect in empathic processes. Bischof-Köhler adds that the empathic response is "primarily an emotional response" (ibid.) and that it "may be caused by the expressive behavior of the other or by the person's situation" (ibid.).

Yet one important question here is: what motivates us to feelingly grasp or even share *how* someone feels, to go beyond the mere perception of another's emotional state? If I can identify the emotion of another person and if I even understand why she is having that emotion, why should I move on to feel for *myself* how it feels for her? Why do I need to *share* her feeling, especially if it is not a very positive one? I will later present Jeannette Mageo's account of empathy in Samoa that might offer an answer to these questions by defining empathy as redirected attachment. If we take her idea seriously, then empathy is precisely to be distinguished from a cold understanding in the sense of ToM, since sharing emotions helps to establish social bonds and to attach oneself to others we identify with – at least to a certain degree.

Let me address two more questions which I think are important. The first one will focus on whether empathy is only possible in real encounters between humans, the second is about its moral dimension. First, Batson (2009) does not explicitly mention whether the different uses of empathy apply to human encounters only or whether empathy does also occur when engaging with fiction, for example the characters in a story. Some researchers think that empathy is also active when imagining fictional scenarios and therefore support the view that empathy does not require the presence of a real human being (Breithaupt, 2012; Walter, 2012). Such a view on empathy seems to be justified at least historically (Vischer, 1927). Batson's concepts 5 and 6 are about imaginative capacities, and so one might suspect that they can also be directed to story characters. However, Batson claims to have identified two major research questions that guide the field of empathy research, namely, how one knows another's thoughts and feelings and what leads one to respond with sensitivity and care to the suffering of another (2009, pp. 8-9). With this in mind, it seems as if Batson was actually not thinking of fictional scenarios, but real encounters between human beings.

A broad use of the concept of empathy that allows for it to occur in virtual encounters is, to my view, not without problems. Despite of its origin in aesthetics, the term empathy is nowadays mostly applied to the context of real human-human encounters. According to de Waal, the "lowest common denominator of all empathic processes is that one party is affected by another's emotional or arousal state" (2008, p. 282). Such a kind of affection does typically occur when one can directly perceive the other person. At this point, I have to come back to the example of Donald given above. In this example, I said that the direct perception of Donald's sadness provides us with an answer to the *what*-question. Although this is true, it is not the whole story, since direct perception is not a 'cold' kind of perception. The other's expression *im-presses* us, we resonate with someone's sadness or joy, or, as de Waal would say, we are affected by his emotional or arousal state. The direct perception of another person is therefore an important aspect for empathic processes to occur and also an important aspect that helps us to understand *how* a specific emotion is experienced by the other. If we read a novel and use our imagination to immerse ourselves into the story, our own imaginations can cause emotional reactions in us. We might favour a certain protagonist and literally feel with him. Importantly, however, these feelings are caused by a narrative and our own imaginary constructs. We do not understand another human being. Instead of feeling into someone, we feel into an imaginary scenario, and in doing so, we feel something. But what we feel is obviously different from what another *real* person *really* feels. Therefore, although we might be affected by fictive characters and their mental states (which we are told in a story), it is certainly a very different kind of affection than when another human being is present.[15] If we apply the concept of empathy for both situations, we ignore this difference and end up losing the potential power of the empathy concept for our real intersubjective encounters as well as the possibility to add something to what the ToM-framework has on offer. Let me explain why. The ToM account was criticized as a detached account, reducing social cognition to what happens if people think about others from a *3rd-person-perspective* (Fuchs & De Jaegher, 2009; De Jaegher, Di Paolo & Gallagher, 2010), i.e. from an observational stance that excludes direct interaction and mutual influence. Critics have repeatedly argued that social cognition research should focus on direct interactions and on interactions where people are *emotionally* involved with each other (Reddy, 2008). While ToM was traditionally associated especially with others' beliefs and desires, empathy is commonly thought of as a

[15] It is not by accident that we can be struck by a *present* person's appearance and immediately fall in love with her in a way modern dating possibilities via Internet can never compensate for, although text, pictures and voice can easily be transmitted and exchanged online. This illustrates that another's physical presence adds something very important to the components just mentioned.

process directed at another's emotions. Its focus on emotions, on the question of how something feels like from the other's point of view, is what makes empathy different from more detached processes associated with ToM. Against this background, applying empathy for engagement with fiction amounts to throwing out the baby with the bath water.

The second question to be addressed is whether empathy is morally positive or neutral, i.e. whether empathy can also be used to harm others. The paradigmatic example would be the expert torturer who might be especially good at his job because he uses empathy to torture as effectively as possible. While some researchers think that compassion or sympathy are the most common motivational consequences of empathy (Bischof-Köhler, 2012, p. 45; Harris, 2007, p. 169; Preston & Hofelich, 2012), that empathy is essentially an altruistic impulse or response (de Waal, 2009, pp. 115-117), others think that empathy is rather morally neutral and that "some facets of empathy allow competitors to better understand and hence undermine each other" (Breithaupt, 2012). In his list, Batson doesn't really take a stand here and does not explicitly object to the idea that empathy might also be at work in the case of torture, for example. However, concepts seven and eight seem to suggest that Batson thinks of empathy as a rather compassionate state. In line with this, he considers the question of what leads one to respond with sensitivity and care to the suffering of another (2009, pp. 8-9) as one of the major research questions in the field of empathy research.

The example of the skilled torturer is repeatedly mentioned in order to argue that empathy can also be used for malicious means. Note, however, that there is yet another option. Instead of thinking that empathy is either morally neutral (and therefore also applicable in the case of torture) or a compassionate response, I suggest that empathy primarily indeed *is* a compassionate response, but that the positive implications of this response for others can – as a consequence of specific experiences in the course of life – be inhibited, suppressed, unlearned and finally turned upside down. Consider the following situation. You are in a hurry and rush down the pedestrian precinct. You hesitate when a beggar in a pitiable condition asks you for money. You are immediately affected by his emotional expression and feel a bit miserable, you realize that you start imagining how he might have ended up like this and suddenly are in the middle of an empathic process. But you are in a conflict, since you are already late. You inhibit your empathic reaction (cf. Breithaupt, 2012), start rationalizing, and end up becoming cynical. Suddenly, you feel angry. You even feel, although covertly, the tendency to insult and publicly humiliate that person for his laziness and inability to pursue a normal life. And somehow, you feel that you would precisely know how to effectively insult and shame this person. Your primary empathic reaction has changed and your consequent

reaction might be something like a defense mechanism that inhibits the primary empathic reaction as well as its claim for compassionate behaviour (for example to donate some money).

Some might wonder why I do not simply use the term sympathy to refer to compassionate reponses. Sympathy is derived from the Greek *sympatheía*, meaning “feeling with”, “compassion”, “liking”. None of the meanings of the term sympathy is about knowing *how* someone feels. Empathy, in contrast to sympathy, gives us a deeper, emotionally enriched understanding of another person, since we allow ourselves to share anothers’ feeling in order to grasp the *how*-aspect of his experience. This presupposes sympathy, and this is why I think empathy is primarily a compassionate response.[16] In the course of the following chapters, I will back up this argument with anthropological data and theories.

### 3.4 Summary

At this point, I have presented different usages of the term empathy sensu Batson as well as different definitions and argued for the pros and cons. Moreover, I have tried to (preliminarily) answer some open questions in empathy research in order to come closer to my own definition. Although I argued that we should not equate empathy with simulation theory, I still think that one aspect of simulation processes, namely, taking the other’s perspective via imaginative processes in the sense of Batson’s concepts 4-6, is an important part of empathy as well. As a summary of this chapter, I will try to provide a tentative definition of empathy as it results from the analysis above. I have tried to argue that empathy helps us to understand *how* another person feels. Moreover, I have tried to argue that it is reasonable to speak of empathy only in real human-human encounters, in which we are somehow affected by another person’s emotional expression or arousal (cf. de Waal, 2008). Empathy is, at least primarily, a compassionate reaction that leads us to share or feelingly grasp another’s emotion. As a consequence, *empathy is a primarily compassionate reaction to another’s expressed emotional state that leads us to understand the ‘how’-aspect of another’s experience via a combination of imaginative processes and sharing*.

[16] As an indirect support of this view, Decety and Jackson say in their influential article on empathy: “Of all the sources from which one can draw insight as to the constituents of human empathy, psychotherapeutic schools provide the most interesting, experience-related knowledge” (2004, p. 74). If this is true, then “the most interesting, experience-related knowledge” on empathy is derived from a setting where the basic compassionate orientation of the therapist is beyond question. Although the field of psychotherapy offers interesting insights on empathy, I will not deal with it in the present work.

With respect to cultural anthropology, I have pointed out in the introduction that anthropologists are especially interested in emic concepts of empathic-like phenomena. The different anthropological reports will be presented in the next chapter. At the end of it, we will be able to complement Batson's list and to readdress the question what empathy is. These reports will help us to rethink some of the questions raised in this chapter, namely, whether we should think of empathy as something with positive motivational consequences or something that can be used for negative purposes as well, whether empathy can only occur when someone else is present and whether we must be affected by another's emotional state or arousal. At the end of the next chapter, we will then be able to refine the definition of empathy just given.

## 4. Anthropological opacity and empathy reports

The aim of this chapter is to give a review of the recent anthropological contributions that deal with the opacity of other minds as well as with the role of empathy and its local shapings in these communities. The first four contributions focus on opacity rather than empathy and were part of the *Anthropological Quarterly* issue on the opacity of other minds edited by Robbins and Rumsey in 2008. Robbins and Rumsey both conducted field research in Papua New Guinea, and both were concerned with the relationship between opacity claims and practices of confession. This "co-occurrence within Melanesianist ethnography of two apparently contradictory motifs" (Rumsey, 2008, p. 455), namely, the prevalence of opacity claims and a rising prominence of confession practices, gave the impetus for the Social Thought and Commentary section in Anthropological Quarterly (cf. Rumsey, 2008).

The rest of the anthropological contributions reviewed here were either published in the *Ethos* issue on empathy edited by Hollan and Throop in 2008 or in the book *Towards an anthropology of empathy* edited by the same authors in 2011. Most reports are from Papua New Guinea (PNG). This does not mean that the opacity phenomenon is something specific to PNG – there are reports from Polynesia as well as from Central America. Rather, the debate on the opacity of other minds was started by anthropologists specialized in PNG.

But before turning towards the different reports, some words on the scope of opacity reports are necessary. Hollan and Throop (2011) raise the question whether the opacity of other minds phenomenon does "indicate that people really do avoid acting upon, or even speculating about, other people's thoughts, feelings, and intentions" (ibid., p. 9) in cases where mental states are not directly or consciously expressed. Opacity assertions give rise to the idea that people in those places might not only assert opacity, but that they might *function* differently, that other minds really might be unknowable, i.e. opaque, to them. This idea is nourished when anthropologists say that "the relative value and desirability – even the *possibility* – of social knowing can vary significantly both within and between cultural contexts" (Groark, 2008, p. 430, emphasis added). Could it be that people who were born and raised in such places really *cannot* know other minds while people from other places without opacity doctrines can? Such a view would remind us very much of the ironical scenario of an 'opacity island' sketched in the introduction. Robbins and Rumsey (2008) say that "one can distinguish something like a "strong reading" of opacity statements – a reading that assumes that such statements really do have an impact on how people approach the task of understanding one another, rather than just on how they talk about how they think about one another" (ibid., p. 410). Kevin Groark, in referring to the different anthropological

contributions and what they tell us about the possibility of knowing what goes on in another's mind, says that they are "ranging from 'strong opacity positions' which assert the global impossibility of accessing such knowledge, to 'weak opacity positions' marked by an assertion of opacity in interaction, but a recognition that such knowledge can in fact be gained" (in press). The idea of a global impossibility of gaining such knowledge is in fact a tempting exoticism. I have demonstrated in the introduction of this work how influential ToM ideas have become, and that it is precisely this influence that makes opacity claims so tempting. Before, the only human beings that were reported to have problems with gaining knowledge about other people's minds are people with autism or deaf children and youngsters (Baron-Cohen, Leslie & Frith, 1985; Peterson & Siegal, 1995). Thinking that ToM might be our main route for understanding others and something like the cognitive precondition that allows for more complex social interactions gives rise to a highly questionable idea, namely, that people who claim opacity might be delayed or hampered in terms of social cognition. From a historical point of view, this comes very close to colonialist ideas stressing the superiority of the Western mind. A careful clarification of the opacity phenomenon is therefore an important thing to do.

Picking up the existing terminology, I will distinguish between a "strong" and "weak" reading of opacity doctrines in the analysis of the anthropological reports to come. I will classify an anthropological interpretation as a strong reading if the anthropologist interprets opacity reports as really referring to the impossibility of knowing the minds of others, be it because of cognitive deficits or due to extreme social constraints. In contrast, I will classify any interpretation as a weak reading if it does not deny the fundamental possibility of gaining such knowledge at least in certain contexts, although opacity claims as well as a different shaping of mindreading practices and empathy might be reported.

It will become evident that actually nobody endorses a strong reading. Hollan and Throop, in reflecting on the different contributions, draw the same conclusion: "None support the idea that the opacity doctrine is an actual claim about the fundamental unknowability of other minds" (2011, p. 10).

### 4.1 Anthropological reports

The following reports will not only be analyzed with respect to whether their authors endorse a strong or weak opacity reading - more importantly, I will try to deduce how the authors use concepts like empathy and mindreading with the conceptual tools and definitions developed in the previous chapters.

### *4.1.1 Ku Waru, Papua New Guinea*

Rumsey argues that among the Ku Waru people in Papua New Guinea, traditional forms of confession preceded the Christian ones. Ku Waru people believe that if people do not confess, they can become physically ill or even die (cf. Rumsey, 2008). As an example, Rumsey mentions that clansmen were gathering to confess before important or risky activities, e.g. battles. On these occasions, they had the possibility to confess individual transgressions and feelings of anger and were usually forgiven. At such occasions, Ku Waru people feel an extra pressure to confess "because people believe that those who go into battle with unexpressed grievances or concealed transgressions on their minds are much more likely to be killed in the fighting" (Rumsey, 2008, p. 459). Practices of confession are, according to Rumsey, "designed to reveal" (ibid., p. 455) what is in another person's mind. Therefore, so goes the argument, they contrast with opacity claims and corresponding local theories of what can be known. Another common belief among the Ku Waru people also seems to be in contrast with the observed opacity claims, namely, the idea that although the content of people's minds may differ, "the way in which their minds work is similar" (ibid., p. 464). Moreover, Ku Waru people "believe that the condition of one's skin provides a reliable indicator of one's state of mind" (ibid., p. 465). This is an important comment, since it points to a form of bodily empathy, to a heightened monitoring of that which is perceptually given. We will hear more about this from other places where the anthropological data yield more information. Other exceptions can be found in the case of erotic love and courtship, as "it is said to be possible for each member of a couple to know what is in the other's mind because it is the same as what is in their own" (ibid.).

Rumsey endorses a weak opacity reading when he concludes that "people's statements about their inability to see inside the mind of another should not be taken to mean that they do not, in practice, make inferences about other people's intentional states, and act more-or-less successfully on them" (ibid., p. 470, footnote 20). He says that people do mainly disavow the practice of inferring other people's intentional states in cases where matters of intentionality are contentious, i.e. crimes and social transgressions (ibid.).

### *4.1.2 Urapmin, Papua New Guinea*

Robbins' research among the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea focused on the changes that occur in communities where opacity claims are prevalent when the "imported" practice of Protestant conversion suddenly requires sincere speech as well as on people's struggle with

these changes. Robbins deals with an important question, namely, which kind of ethnographic evidence might "demonstrate that people were not, despite their opacity claims, mind-reading just the same" (2008, p. 428). According to Robbins, the very fact that there are struggles involved in the adoption to Christian practices of confession "offers some proof that those involved in them were not, before conversion, in the habit of trying to be sincere speakers or to interpret other people's utterances in terms of the intentions that motivated them" (ibid., pp. 424-425). His argument goes as follows:

> if, despite their ideological protestations to the contrary, people were in fact acting as sincere speakers and mind-reading interpreters all along, we would have to imagine that the task of constituting themselves as Christian linguistic subjects…would not be as difficult as these accounts show it to be (ibid., p. 425).

It seems as if Robbins, in contrast to Rumsey, fancies and votes for a strong opacity reading. However, Robbins then softens his point by mentioning the possible counter-argument that the struggles involved in adopting Christian assumptions about the knowability of other minds (as reflected in confession practices, for example) might tell us "nothing about what goes on in people's heads, but only about the institutions in which people cast their social performances" (ibid.). Robbins goes on to examine these struggles and says that "Urapmin tell several stories of people who nearly committed suicide out of shame after publicly confessing their own sins or having them confessed by others" (ibid.).

This suggets, that for Urapmin people, it is rather *mindrevealing* than mindguessing or mental state inference which is negatively experienced and considered as shameful. However, Robbins reports "the reaction of almost fear or disgust Urapmin often express at the very suggestion that they might know what others are thinking" (ibid., p. 426). Apparently, there is also fear or disgust involved in knowing other minds or at least in witnessing their revelation. When Robbins asked people about what others were thinking, he felt as if he "had asked them to peek in on someone doing something very shameful in private" (ibid.).

Among the Urapmin, Robbins tells us, women initiate marriages by "calling the name" (*win bakamin*) of the man they want to mary (cf. Robbins, 2008). Women have to find a man who is willing to hear and officially confirm this. Robbins point out how "difficult it is for a woman to ask that another person hear her speech as a reflection of her mind and how shameful it is for a man who agrees to listen to her to treat her speech in this way" (ibid., p. 427). This practice serves, according to Robbins, "as evidence of how marked sincere speech

and mind-reading interpretation were (and still are) in traditional Urapmin understanding" (ibid.). In my view, he is not using the correct term at this point. If a man agrees to hear a woman's confession, there is no need for him to 'mindread', since it is precisely in cases of sincere speech where we don't have to think about what is going on in another's mind. What is shameful is the act of *revealing* the mind as well as gathering such a direct insight into another person's feelings and thoughts as a hearer, to see her *exposed*. If listening to sincere speech had something to do with anything like 'mindreading', then the question arises which practice would be required in cases of insincere speech. My suggestion is that 'mindreading' understood as mindguessing and/or mental state inference is rather helpful in cases of insincere speech.

With respect to confession, Robbins observed that even "pastors and deacons take to distance themselves from the sincere speech that is spoken at confession" (ibid., p. 428). According to Robbins, this suggests that "producing the sincere speaker has proven easier in Urapmin than has producing the listener willing to treat speech as a window in other minds" (ibid.). This comment is helpful, as it suggests that people might know very well that sincere speech is a "window in other minds" – and this is precisely what makes things difficult in a culture where the exposure of individual feelings and thoughts was not part of normal everyday interactions.

Rather than having difficulties with reading opaque minds, Urapmin appear to have difficulties with handling people whose minds have – due to practices of confession - suddenly become transparent.

Although Robbins' initially appeared sympathetic to a strong reading of opacity claims, his own data appear to be more about problems people have in revealing their minds. If nobody reveals his own mind, people might indeed appear opaque to each other. However, this does not necessarily tell us anything about the strategies people might still use to gain insights into other people's mind.

#### *4.1.3 Kaluli, Papua New Guinea*

Schieffelin did field research among Kaluli, a subgroup of the Bosavi Kalu (men from Bosavi) in Papua New Guinea. She tells us that Bosavi people resisted confessing because mental states were considered as truly private. Schieffelin argues that "in a society where almost everything else could be known about a person, people resisted being coerced into giving moral accounts or making explicit what they were thinking about" (2008, p. 438).

Schieffelin was mainly interested in language socialization and described how prompting routines socialized children into culturally preferred patterns of how to speak, think, and feel.

She describes how older speakers tell young children to say something to a third party, thus prompting utterances that include internal states. She argues, however, that caregivers are not speaking for their children "in the sense of reading their minds" (ibid., p. 433). Instead, caregivers' "directives to their 2-3 year olds to speak are deemed to be situationally or interactionally appropriate rather than originating with the child's interest or internal state, which Bosavi claim cannot be known" (ibid.). In other words, caregivers say for their children what should be said – they do not try to interpret nonverbal behaviour or unclear utterances. Nevertheless, since these prompted utterances include internal states, mental state attribution does clearly occur among Bosavi. Early correlates of such prompting routines can be observed in caregiver-child interactions. Bosavi caregivers "do not verbally expand child utterances, nor guess the meaning of unintelligible utterances" (ibid., p. 434). In line with this, there is also no baby-talk lexicon among the Kaluli (cf. Ochs & Schieffelin, 1994). These early activities of language socialization teach children "not to verbally guess at or express others' unvoiced intentions and unclear meanings" (Schieffelin, 2008, p. 433). Interestingly, Kaluli children are nevertheless "encouraged to verbalize their own desires and intentions" (ibid.).

Bosavi children must learn to report what they hear without attributing meaning and to indicate the source of information. Therefore, Bosavi interactions "draw heavily on indirect speech styles which socially distribute the responsibility for inferring meaning" (ibid., p. 435). Saying something without clear justification would amount to gossiping. But once a person "verbally expresses his or her thought, desire, or inner state to another, however, it can circulate as a directly quoted utterance with its author made explicit and with appropriate evidential markings" (ibid., p. 436). In other words, the individual person should not infer meaning and irresponsibly distribute her own interpretation – rather, she should distribute facts in indirect speech with an exact specification of the source of information.

Although Kaluli state that "one cannot know what another thinks or feels" (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1994, p. 484), Schieffelin does not interpret these statements in a strong sense. She says that "Kaluli obviously interpret and assess one another's available behaviors and internal states", but "these interpretations are not culturally acceptable as topics of talk" (ibid.). They do talk, however, about their own feelings (cf. Ochs & Schieffelin, 1994). According to Schieffelin, opacity claims among the Kaluli point to "a cultural dispreference for talking about or making claims about what another might think, what another might feel, or what another is about to do, especially if there is no external evidence" (ibid.). Schieffelin

tells us that Bosavi attribute mental states and that they interpret and assess available behaviour as well as internal states.

#### *4.1.4 Korowai, Papua New Guinea*

Stasch did his field research among the Korowai in Papua New Guinea. He explains that Korowai consider otherness of thoughts as a matter of politics and vice versa. Stasch draws upon the work of philosopher Richard Moran and argues that the main difference between self- and other-knowledge is not an epistemological one but a difference concerning the authority over mental states (cf. Stasch, 2008). Although the epistemological access towards my own mental states might be biased as well, I am still the only one who can claim authority over them. Stasch therefore hypothesizes that opacity claims might be "not only about knowledge and meaning but also about authority" (2008, p. 443). Among the Korowai, people do not directly state that one cannot know what is in another person's mind, but they frequently repeat the "verbal formula yepa yexulmelun, literally "Herself her thoughts," or "Himself his thoughts," an expression closely parallel to canonical statements about opacity of other minds reported from many other New Guinea communities" (ibid., p. 444). Stasch heard this formula when he asked why a third person had done a certain action or whether a third person would do a certain action in the future. Informants reacted by disavowing knowledge of other people's thoughts: "The assertion "She has her own thoughts" is an argument against an opposite idea people took to be implied in my questions, an idea of mind-reading" (ibid.). Note, however, that if Korowai people take the idea of 'mindreading' to be implied in such questions, then they must know about its possibility. Indeed, Stasch reports:

> Plenty of times, though, interviewees did answer my questions about reasons for others` actions with statements of those people's motives, and they answered questions about others' future actions with outright predictions of what those others would do. It seems also that disavowal of telepathy is topic-specific. (ibid.)

In providing motives for others's actions, Korowai clearly engage in mental state attribution and mindguessing. Stasch goes on to report that Korowai readily "attribute to others thoughts of ill-regard" (ibid.) towards *themselves*, even if there is no evidence for it. Apparently, it is fine "to claim quasi-telepathic knowledge of someone else's thoughts about one's own worth, even when it is not fine to presume to know or impinge on that person's own plans and hopes for him- or herself" (ibid., pp. 444-445). Moreover, Stasch says that Korowai represent other

people's thoughts in their speech and use a special particle for doing so: di- (to say) represents "a quotation of thought, not audible speech" (ibid., p. 445). Accordingly, opacity claims among the Korowai are for Stasch "a focus of sensitivity and instability, rather than asolute embargo" (ibid.). Stasch, too, does obviously not support a strong opacity reading. As a consequence, Stasch interprets the Korowai form of the opacity claim not as a statement against any idea of 'mindreading', but as a statement that supports the idea of personal autonomy: "Making these statements, speakers affirm a principle that people's actions are determined by their thoughts, not something outside their thoughts. The anti-telepathy statements are assertions of the reality and consequentiality of other people's thinking" (ibid.). We have seen in the first chapter that this idea sounds very much like a basic tenet of the theory of mind framework. In this view, children who acquire a full-fledged theory of mind understand that behaviour is driven by mental states. From this point on, what children understand is almost paradigmatically expressed by Stasch: "What the other person is going to do will be determined by the person's processes of thought leading to an action, not by conditions that are already known" (ibid.).

If Korowai receive unexpected gifts, they also use the expression that Stasch considers to be the Korowai form of the opacity claim, "himself his/herself her own thoughts". In Stasch's interpretation, "thought" serves like an "all-purpose explanation" (ibid., p. 446) of why people do what they do, for example in cases where the reasons for a certain behaviour are not immediately evident. Stasch tells us that one "culturally-valued Korowai understanding of what organizes human action is a model of persons forming specific goals and acting deliberately to bring them about" (ibid., p. 447). The Korowai formula is also evoked in cases of social conflict, referring to "disparities of will" (ibid.) rather than difficulties of knowing what might be in another's mind. When Stasch asked informants whether Korowai people think silently without speaking, they confirmed this without hesitation and mentioned examples like "thinking of shooting somebody, of having sex with someone's wife, or of killing someone's pig" (ibid., p. 448). Stasch concluded that Korowai "associate silent contemplation with deception, bad intentions, violation, and awareness that one's desires are at odds with what other people want" (ibid.). This association points to a conflict that arises not only in Korowai culture, namely, the potential difference between outer appearance and inner silent soliloquy. Since Korowai value transparent expression as well as enactment of social harmony, and self-determination (ibid.), these values automatically clash with the belief that people are silently occupied with asocial ideas and bad intentions.

As a consequence, Korowai want to find out what others are up to:

> Often, too, Korowai would like to know what other people are thinking, and they take steps to find out through speech. Conversely, wary in advance what others will infer or speculate about their own intentions, people take great pains to report their intentions aloud and head off particular inferences about their thoughts that other might form. (Stasch, 2008, p. 451)

Summing up, it seems as if the Korowai example is not very convincing if one wants to make a case for the opacity of other minds phenomenon. The Korowai do not say that one cannot know what is in another person's mind. Instead, they emphasize the individual's authority over own thoughts. They engage, in specific contexts, in speculations of what others are up to. Korowai want to know what others are thinking and they even anticipate that others might speculate or infer their own intentions.

#### *4.1.5 Anuta, Solomon Islands*

Feinberg did his fieldwork in Anuta, a Polynesian community in the Solomon Islands. According to Feinberg, Anutans "affirm the opacity of other minds in myriad statements" (2011, p. 155). Feinberg starts with a concept that appears to be most important to Anutans, namely, *aropa*, which is commonly translated as love, sympathy, pity or compassion (cf. Feinberg, 2011). Similar concepts can be found in any other Polynesian language, variants include the Samoan *alofa*, the Hawaiian *aloha*, or *aroha* among the Maori of New Zealand. Aropa is enacted via economic assistance or sharing of things like houses, land, and food. Aropa is also tied to the definition of kin, as Anutans define kin as those persons who demonstrate aropa in their interactions (cf. Feinberg, 2011). Feinberg warns us, however, that the "English glosses for *aropa* should be treated with caution, as they typically suggest internal emotional states" (2011, p. 162). Although "*aropa* involves an inner state as well as outward action" (ibid.), Anutans express aropa mainly through supporting behaviour.

In addition to the concept of *aropa*, Feinberg discusses other local concepts that are of relevance in intersubjective encounters. The term *maanatu* "can refer to analytic thought or having an opinion" (ibid., p. 153) and is also used for speculation or projection. The direct translation of "to guess", however, is *matea*. The word *atamai* refers to one's own mind and "applies to affect as well as cognition" (ibid.). An important emotion among Anutans is shame, *pakamaa*. For Feinberg, "embarrassment or shame requires an ability to place oneself, metaphorically, in someone else's skin: it is a response to what one thinks another thinks of

him or her" (ibid., p. 154). In linking the experience of shame to thoughts about what others might think, Feinberg does not seem to support a strong opacity reading - quite on the contrary. According to Feinberg, Anutans "show intense concern about each other's "real" intentions" (ibid., p. 156), they "are concerned with feelings and intentions as predictors of future behavior" (ibid., p. 162), they "frequently formulate hypotheses about what others are thinking and feeling" (ibid., p. 157) and "they try to interpret the intentions behind others' speech acts" (ibid.). Moreover, Anutans "display empathy in a variety of contexts" (ibid.) and they "readily express their emotions" (ibid., p. 163, footnote 9). Against this background, there is no reason to believe that Anutan opacity claims might point to deeper cultural differences concerning empathy, theory of mind or mental state talk. But why, then, do Anutans assert the opacity of other minds? According to Feinberg, Anutans invoke the opacity of other minds in certain cases "to give the benefit of the doubt to someone who had made a questionable assertion" (ibid., p. 156). Further, it is used "to impugn others' honesty or good intentions" (ibid.). Whereas opacity claims led other researchers to conclude that people might view each others' minds as utterly opaque and impenetrable, Feinberg suggests a very different interpretation for the Anutan case in stating that "their views are similar to those of Westerners; we are just more hypocritical" (ibid.). What Feinberg wants to say is that nobody can really know what someone else is thinking, and whether overt utterances do really mirror the thoughts of someone remains uncertain, in Anuta as well as in Europe or Northern America. Therefore, Feinberg concludes:

> Their view of other minds' accessibility is fundamentally similar to that of Europeans or Americans. They recognize that one's ability to read another's thoughts is limited, but that limitation does not preempt their ability to empathize any more than it does ours. (ibid., p. 157)

Nevertheless, Anutans emphasize observable behaviour. Feinberg tells us that they are "primarily concerned with one another's actions rather than their inner states" (ibid., p. 162).
Summing up, we can say that Feinberg demonstrates the most constitutive aspects of what is commonly understood as 'mindreading' in Anuta. However, he does not develop a full-fledged account of Anutan empathy. He warns us that there is no word in Anutan language that could easily be translated as empathy. Nevertheless, Feinberg presents *aropa* as at least overlapping with it "in several critical respects" (ibid.), since the concept of *aropa* touches what is also associated with empathy in Western countries, namely, love, compassion,

sympathy, and pity. What I consider to be most interesting about his contribution, however, is that he presents Anutans as people that are absolutely interested in other people's minds in spite of the fact that they claim the opacity of other minds. The Anutan case is therefore a clear proof that opacity claims do not necessarily force a rethinking of theory of mind (Robbins & Rumsey, 2008).

#### *4.1.6 Asabano, Papua New Guinea*

Lohmann, referring to Robbins and Rumsey (2008), repeats their view that the opacity of other minds phenomenon "challenges social scientific views that empathy is necessary for sociality" (Lohmann, 2011, p. 99). His own research among the Asabano of Papua New Guinea, however, "provides an example of how, such beliefs notwithstanding, empathy does exist in such societies, though conceptualized, valued, and learned in culturally distinctive ways" (ibid.).

Asabano believe that one cannot directly witness other people's inner states. As a consequence, certain knowledge is impossible. Asabano people, however, say that their hearts can be "with others". The bound morpheme *sosati-* can be translated as "heart-with" and is used in a variety of expressions. In addition to this term, *mable* "refers to mentation as a whole, inclusive of thinking, feeling, remembering, imagining, and planning" (ibid., p. 100). Mentation occurs in the heart (*sosabu*). Consequently, thinking and feeling are not considered as separate, Asabano refer to both as *sosamableta* or "heart mentating" (ibid., p. 101). Lohmann tells us that "Asabano trust their senses as sources of relatively sure knowledge" (ibid., p. 103). Asabano engage in "empathetic exercises" (ibid.) through a combination of sensory perceptions and own imagination.

Lohmann refers to sosati- as "heart-togetherness" (ibid., p.102) and says that it does not imply certain knowledge about others' inner states. According to Lohmann, it rather expresses what one knows about one's own state of mind regarding another person (ibid., p. 104). Heart-togetherness, then, "derives from knowledge of one's own thoughts about another, particularly when enriched by sensory data" (ibid., p. 103). It enables people to imaginatively create "an experiential scenario from the perspective of the empathizee that is likely to be at least partially accurate" (ibid., p. 104). In addition, a form of "bodily empathy" is acknowledged among Asabano people. They interpret "certain bodily signs in themselves as indicating something about the condition of people beyond other sensory indicators" (ibid., p. 103). When such sympathetic clues are discovered in or on one's own body, they are interpreted and used "as a means of long-distance "perception" of the state of other people"

(ibid., p. 105). An example for this form of bodily empathy is *isi'sitibu*, a phenomenon in which one's underarm sweats without exertion. This is interpreted by Asabano people as indicating that someone will soon arrive. Lohmann describes *isi'sitibu*, like "heart-togetherness", as a "culture-bound, empathy-like syndrome" (ibid., p. 106) that does only provide sure knowledge about oneself.

Besides his description of the Asabano, Lohmann's contribution is also interesting as he explicitly deals with more theoretical aspects of research on empathy. In contrast to other anthropological contributions, Lohmann clearly positions himself and gives us an idea of how he conceptualizes empathy. Moreover, he also relates empathy to theory of mind. Lohmann argues that in order "to empathize or even speak with others, one must assume that they have minds that are in basic respects similar to one's own, and one must have some ability to predict how they will understand and react to particular events and utterances" (ibid., p. 96). Lohmann considers these abilities as a basis for empathy and explicitly states that empathy depends on theory of mind (ibid.). He argues that "in order to copy behaviors and attitudes, one must be able to represent what others think and feel" (ibid., p. 95) and concludes in the next sentence: "Empathy is thus essential for effective sociality, for enculturation, for linguistic communication, and for theorizing about and knowing one another" (ibid.). The ability what others think or feel, however, is usually associated with ToM rather than with empathy. Note, how theory of mind and empathy are conflated here: is empathy or theory of mind essential for effective sociality? Lohmann argues that theory of mind is the basis for empathy and concludes that empathy is essential for effective sociality, but what *is* empathy according to Lohmann? Before I will try to provide an answer, it must be noted that some of Lohmann's assumptions are highly controversial. It is neither uncontested that we need to represent others' mental states in order to copy or imitate them, nor is it a common assumption that empathy depends on ToM – rather, some researchers think that empathy is prior to ToM (cf. Bischof-Köhler, 2012). With regard to empathy, Lohmann starts by – I think correctly – stating that the English folk concept of empathy assumes a rather active, positive regard for the person empathized with and emphasizes emotional rather than intellectual identification with the empathizee (cf. Lohmann, 2011, pp. 107-108). Lohmann points to the difficulty of working with concepts from one's own folky psychological assumptions in other cultural contexts, since they might "distort our descriptions of other emic realities in unintended ways" (ibid., p. 108). As the English folk concept of empathy is itself an emic model, it cannot serve the purpose of cross-cultural comparisons. In order to avoid this problem, Lohmann suggests to take etically defined definitions of empathy as for example

provided by Preston and de Waal (2002) as a starting point for analyzing and categorizing deviations in the anthropological record (cf. Lohmann, 2011). The general contributions of his own work among the Asabano for empathy research are described by Lohmann as follows:

> If Asaba models of empathy have value for etic theory, it is to point out that empathy provides certain knowledge only about the empathizer's inner state. The information it provides about the empathizee is an estimate based on reasonable, suggestive, but more or less incomplete evidence. (ibid., p. 109)

Finally, Lohmann presents his view on empathy:

> Empathy exists at the interface between sensory perceptions and imagination. One draws on sensed indicators of the other person's inner state and one's own memories, thoughts, and feelings to build a semblance or a representation of those attitudes in one's own mind. This representation may be more or less accurate than one thinks. Information about the environment obtained by the senses, though enmeshed in cultural and situational contexts and partly subjective, includes empirical facts. But empathy is brought to life through the imagination's placing oneself in the other person's shoes, as the expression goes.
> (ibid., p. 111)

Empathy, in Lohmann's view, is a process where sensory perceptions are used as a starting point for one's own imagination. Similar views on empathy are quite common among anthropologists, as we will shortly see.

#### *4.1.7 Banaban, Fiji*

According to Hermann, the Banabans in Fiji "represent themselves, on the one hand, as possessing a special capacity to show pity for others and, on the other hand, as having a special claim on others when it comes to receiving understanding and compassion from them" (Hermann, 2011, p. 35). Banabans are originally from Banaba Island in west-central Oceania, but they have been living in Fiji for more than half a century. According to Hermann, the term *te nanoanga* comes closest to our notion of the term empathy. The literal translation would be something like "heart-giving" (ibid., p. 25), and it can be understood "in the sense of turning oneself and one's feelings-thoughts to the other, the better to enable his or her situation to be grasped, and carrying with it the implication of a readiness to help" (ibid., pp. 29-30).

Corresponding feelings that make people feel inclined to help are evoked when people are described as "*kananoanga* or *kawa* – both of which mean "pitiable" or "to be pitied"" (ibid., p. 30).

Hermann tells us that most Banabans tend to translate *te nanoanga* as "pity", while educated Banabans also translate it as "sympathy" or "compassion". It seems as if *te nanoanga* is most comparable to Polynesian terms like the Samoan *alofa*, the Anutan *aropa*, or Hawaiian *aloha* as it encompasses the same complex of associated concepts. Hermann says about the Banabans that "compassion is the basis for their capacity to bond socially with others" (ibid., p. 31). The suggested link between aspects of empathy and bonding is a very interesting one that will be further developed when it comes to Jeannette Mageo's account of Samoan empathy in chapter 5. Hermann says that "compassion and pity for another involve understanding that other and imagining onself as being in the position of the other" (ibid., p. 25). This matches the definition of Hollan and Throop who say "that empathy is a first-person-like perspective on another that involves an emotional, embodied, or experiential aspect" (Hollan & Throop, 2008, pp. 391-392). To take over the perspective of another is already something children must learn. Hermann tells us of an expression used to chastise children: "*tai karoa anne, ba ngke arona ba ngkoe, ko na kawa*, "don't do that, because if this [behavior] was done to you, you would deserve pity" (Hermann, 2011, p. 30). For Hermann, compassion and pity are the central components of what might be considered the Banaban form of empathy (cf. ibid., p. 25). Moreover, she says that in Banaban thinking neither understanding nor concern can be developed in the absence of imagination (cf. ibid., p. 30).

Summing up, Hermann's research among the Banabans provides another example for an emic concept (*te nanoanga*) that is related to such notions as love, compassion, concern, or pity and thus at least partially overlaps with our emic model of empathy. And, like Lohmann (2011), Hermann emphasizes the role of imagination.

#### *4.1.8 Vanatinai, Papua New Guinea*

Vanatinai is a volcanic island belonging to Papua New Guinea. According to Lepowsky, islanders "publicly, rhetorically deny the possibility of empathy, of imaginative understanding of and identification with the thoughts/feelings of another being" (2011, p. 49). Lepowsky asks the usual question that automatically arises when faced with radical opacity claims: "Is empathy, then – the imaginative experience of another's state of being – culturally envisioned and even possible, given the Vanatinai worldview and concepts of person, and in particular the centrality of an overt denial of ever being able to imaginatively experience the *renuanga*

of others?" (ibid., p. 45). Among Vanatinai people, the term *renuanga* "refers to an interior, active, although covert, state of desire or feeling" (ibid., p. 45). A common answer of Vanatinai people when asked about why others behaved in a certain way or what others might be thinking is "We cannot know their *renuanga*" (cf. p. 44). However, Lepowsky goes on to report that in private, for example within the extended familiy or with more intimate friends, Vanatinai people "conjecture at length, in exacting detail, based upon a range of external cues, about what others are thinking and feeling, their renuanga, and how this may affect their interactions with others in the recent past, present, or future" (ibid., p. 49). Obviously, Vanatinai provide another example against strong opacity readings, since they clearly engage in mental-state-talk and mindguessing. However, against the background that one cannot know other persons' true inner state of being, "speech and other forms of action are frequently, in local perspective, either ambiguous or intentionally deceptive" (ibid., p. 45). They are ambiguous because people suspect that more negative and asocial impulses might reside behind publicly expressed utterances and behaviour: "Greed, anger, and jealousy – that is, inner states and desires that conflict with cultural ideals of harmonious sharing – ideally remain concealed and thus do not disrupt the social fabric" (ibid., p. 47). The belief that such negative emotions might reside behind people's public face gives rise to gossip, in which actions, thoughts and feelings of others are interpreted. In a certain sense, these negative emotions *are* opaque, since they are masked by social interactions that are "often deceptive" (ibid., p. 51) and in which "the motives of others – neighbors, affines, exchange partners, spouses, and kin – are suspect" (ibid.). Vanatinai people are therefore eager to compare whether actions of other persons are congruent with social expectations. Lepowsky convincingly argues that such a "kind of heightened sensitivity to, and clandestine interpretation of, the intentions, hidden meanings, and concealed emotional states of others" (ibid., p. 52) is typcial for places where the opacity of other minds is assumed. This heightened sensitivity triggers imaginative processes:

> On Vanatinai it is a customary and frequent, though covert, move to imagine another's point of view, another's emotional and cognitive state of being, imagining how one might oneself think and feel in the other person's psychic situation. Islanders make this move of imagination and identification not, primarily, out of compassion for others or a desire for, or value on, emotional closeness, but out of concern, wariness, or outright fear. (ibid.)

Such a description is reminiscent of Theodore Schwartz, who claimed that a "paranoid ethos" is characteristic of the Melanesian region (cf. 1973). Moreover, those aspects of *renuanga* that must be concealed in public are exteriorized in various ways. For example, they might be exteriorized via "reported dreams and dream analyses, reports of spirit visitations" (Lepowsky, 2011, p. 51). On the other hand, people on Vanatinai strongly believe "in the power to aggressively project one's desires or wishes onto, and within, the person of another" (ibid., p. 48). This idea reflects the belief in personal autonomy among Vanatinai. Magic, sorcery, and witchcraft, from this point of view, are ways of projecting one's own desires onto another person. Interestingly, Lepowsky does interpret Vanatinai opacity claims in the light of this focus on personal autonomy – an interpretation Stasch (2008) has also offered for the Korowai (see above): "The philosophical principle of personal opacity, the interiority of others' thoughts/feelings (*renuanga*), is closely bound to the islanders' fierce insistence on personal autonomy, both as cultural ideology and as daily social practice" (Lepowsky, 2011, p. 47). Another interpretation for the prevalence of opacity claims on Vanatinai goes into the same direction as Feinberg's interpretation of Anutan opacity claims described above:

> The island philosophy of the ultimate unknowability of the inner states of others serves as a useful caution, because it ultimately holds true for all interpersonal encounters in any society. We may think we know. The islanders publicly claim no such omniscience. (Lepowsky, 2011, p. 59)

Summing up, Lepowsky provides another example of a Pacific place where opacity claims are prevalent while people in fact *are* concerned with others' mental states – Vanatinai engage in mental-state-talk and mindguessing. Vanatinai mistrust public speech and behaviour since one cannot know what is really going on in a person and since public interactions are often deceptive. This sort of mistrust in how people present themselves publicly is also common in Yap (Throop, 2008, 2011) and among the Tzotzil Maya of Southern Mexico (Groark, 2008), as we will see. Opacity claims among Vanatinai, therefore, are not about the limits of what can be known. Rather, they reflect an emphasis on personal autonomy as well as a common caution since claims about others' inner – potentially asocial – motivations might disrupt group harmony which is valued among Vanatinai as well as in many other small-scale societies.

#### *4.1.9 Yap, Federated States of Micronesia*

Throop describes Yap as a culture "where local values tied to secrecy, concealment, and privacy place significant epistemological, communicative, and moral limits on possibilities for empathetic attunement between interlocutors" (2008, pp. 402-403). I will discuss Throops account in a bit more detail, since he offers a very elaborate and interesting account of opacity in Yap. Like in many other languages of the Pacific, there is no term in Yapese that could unproblematically be translated as "empathy". However, Throop mentions the terms *runguy* and *amiithuun* as affiliated concepts (cf. 2008, p. 408). If someone is in pain or suffering, the appropriate response in Yap is to feel *runguy*. Throop says that this term "has a broad semantic range that at times appears to overlap with the concept of "empathy" but that I gloss here as "concern/pity/compassion"" (ibid.). The feeling of *runguy* is also what binds a father to his children (ibid., p. 409). *Amiithuun* can describe material causes of physical pain or pains that go along with certain illnesses, however, it is often used in ways that are similar to that of *runguy* (ibid., p. 410). Throop points out the differences to empathy in saying that *runguy* "seems to bear a somewhat closer resemblance to the concept of sympathy" (ibid.) whereas *amiithuun* "seems to suggest a dual directionality of mutual feelings between interlocutors that may not necessarily be operative in empathy as a self-decentering first-person approximation of another's feelings, emotions, thoughts, and concerns" (ibid.).

A socially fully competent person in Yap "is understood to be a person who is able to sacrifice his or her individual desires, wants, wishes, feelings, opinions, and thoughts to family, village, and broader community dictates" (Throop, 2011, p. 120). Throop says that Yap people endorse a "virtue of self-governance, a virtuous way of being-in-the-world that idealizes a disconnect between individual expressivity and an individual's inner life" (Throop, 2008, p. 412).

This cultural logic is also encoded in a popular aphorism. The aphorism *ke luul ni baabaay* can literally be translated as "it ripened, a papaya" and is used to describe persons who cannot effectively control their expressivity and therefore fall short of the ideal of self-governance (cf. Throop, 2008, p. 414). Papayas clearly indicate the state of ripeness via their color, and such a direct – or transparent - expression of what is going on "inside" fails the virtues of self-governance and concealment on Yap island. Rather, people should present an "opaque exterior" (ibid., p. 415). Throop states that the contrast "between internality and externality is at the heart of a number of other aspects of Yapese cultural logic in which metaphors based on the images of surfaces and depths, the visible and the invisible, and the apparent and the hidden are recurrently played out" (ibid., p. 414). The term opacity as analyzed in the first

chapter entails the idea that there potentially is something unperceivable inside an opaque container or behind an opaque barrier. With respect to Yapese cultural logic, the term opacity seems to describe quite well how differences between interiority and exteriority are conceptualized on Yap.

*Awochean* is a Yapese term that refers to the face or front of a person (ibid., p. 415). Moreover, the term “entails the assumption that behind the expressive field of an individual’s face lies an inner world of thought and feeling that is occluded from view” (ibid.). On Yap island, the face and the eyes are believed to “represent that part of the person that is most susceptible to directly evidencing inner feeling states and thoughts” (ibid.). Therefore, people often avert eye gaze or turn their faces in direct interactions. People who are especially skilled at presenting a face that does not express what they might be thinking or feeling have a “good face” (*feal awochean*) (ibid.). Part of this aspect of Yapese folk theory is “the idea that comprehending another’s feelings or thoughts arises from the horizon of perception” (ibid.), more specifically, the perception of facial and eye cues. If a person cannot maintain a “good face” and expresses his inner feelings in front of someone else, this latter person might feel *so ulum*, a sensation that is referred to in English as “goose bumps”. *So ulum* arises “when an individual is put in the uncomfortable position of having to experience another individual inappropriately evidencing the emotional content of his or her mind“ (ibid., p. 417). Whereas the sensation of goose bumps as a result of listening to a classical piece of music, for example, might be pleasant, Throop tells us that the position of experiencing the content of another’s mind is rather “uncomfortable”. Such a reaction resembles Robbins’ description of Urapmin people who even react with disgust in similar situations.

But not only the face should be opaque with respect to a person’s inner thoughts and feelings. The same cultural logic also applies to speech. Oblique communicative practices are common in Yap, and they are “an important means through which to produce and maintain ambiguity in the service of secrecy and concealment” (Throop, 2011, p. 124). Different verbal strategies are used to create a communicative context in which mental states “are rendered opaque” (ibid., p. 125). Some of the strategies mentioned by Throop are talking in opposites, being elusive, only providing the minimal amount of information necessary, deception or lying, benign and derogatory sarcasm, joking and teasing. Together with paralinguistic behaviour like avoiding eye contact and averting one’s front, people on Yap have a huge variety of strategies “to ensure that their interlocutors are never able to garner a clear idea as to what they are really thinking or feeling” (ibid., p. 129).

To sum up, people on Yap island are "effectively enacting expressive opacity" (Throop, 2008, p. 413). As a consequence, it seems to be difficult or might even appear impossible to gain access to another person's subjective life. Because of this difficulty, people on Yap attend to the perceivable effects of activity (cf. Throop, 2008, 2011) rather than to their inner motivations or origins in order to judge or describe other persons' behaviour.

But if people conceal their inner states and interact with "opaque masks", so to speak, while focussing at the same time on actions' effects, is there any place left for empathy then in Yap?

Let's go back to the Yapese focus on perceivable behaviour and actions' effects. In Yap, a communicative norm "requires that individuals explicitly express to others their intended actions prior to setting out to partake in a particular course of action" (Throop, 2008, p. 410). This helps people to anticipate and predict others' actions on the basis of their own announcements, without having to figure out what is going on inside of them. Children are taught from early on not only to consider their actions and reflect on their consequences, but also to think of "how others might evaluate the merits of pursuing such action" (ibid., p. 411). In other words, own actions are considered from very early on as being under constant scrutiny. Questions like "Where are you going?" or "Where are you coming from?" are, from this point of view, more than just "small-talk". Throop argues that "the psychological repercussions of having to think of an appropriate response to requests for information about one's past and future courses of action, especially in light of the possible moral implications arising from blatantly deceptive expressions of one's intentions, are quite arguably tied to a heightening of attention to the merits of engaging in reflection prior to setting off to participate in a particular activity" (ibid., p. 411).

In other words, before acting or speaking, a socially competent adult in Yap thinks of how another might evaluate them and consequently form an opinion or judgment about him on that basis. From this point of view, every action and utterance is intersubjectively adjusted and performed with the other (or the others) in mind. This requires perspective taking at least in cases where standard rules of comportment and standard verbal formulae do not suffice.

Interestingly, the concealment of inner states and the ability to think before acting are closely linked to each other. Not only does thoughtful deliberate action enable the concealment of personal motivations and intentions – norms of secrecy and concealment do also require people to think before acting (Throop, 2011, p. 122).

Throop further argues that opacity on Yap makes people more sensitive to nonverbal cues:

> Because of the pervasiveness of actors seeking to conceal their thoughts and feelings from others, individuals are confronted with the necessity of having to closely monitor their interlocutor's expressions in the hope of achieving some glimpse, however attenuated that might be (i.e., a shaking leg), into the "actual" subjective state of the person that they are interacting with. (2008, p. 417)

But Yap people are not only sensitive to nonverbal cues, the sensitivity towards the slightest evidence of another's subjective life is also lexically indexed. Throop reports that salient lexical distinctions for the emotion of anger concern the extent "to which each variety of anger is detectable through either indirect-nonverbal or explicit-verbal means" (ibid., p. 416). In other words, there are various terms in Yapese for anger, and each term provides information about how clearly it is perceivable. Therefore, Throop argues, "these terms can be understood as culturally elaborated linguistic vehicles highlighting various degrees of explicitness in accessing the contents of another's internal subjective state" (ibid., pp. 416-417).

This heightening of sensitivity is also evident in gossip. People on Yap acknowledge "that there is much of importance that is missed when an individual does not attempt to imagine what the possible motives for a particular individual's actions might be" (ibid., p. 418). Throop says that "gossip about others' feelings, intentions, motives, and reactions is a central part of everyday talk and interaction" (ibid.). It is in the context of gossip that Yap people analyze motives for action and engage in covert speculation. Therefore, gossip "serves as a privileged site for what I would like to term mitigated empathy" (Throop, 2011, p. 137). I do not think that the term empathy is the best suited one here. In gossip, people clearly do engage in mental state talk, they attribute mental states to others and engage in mindguessing. In my view, these terms capture more adequately what is going on in gossip.

As an example, Throop presents an excerpt of two older women who, in talking about other people, discuss and interpret changes in voice of someone, guess about what another person might feel and wonder about the reasons for another's action. The cultural logic on Yap is a good example for how deeply values of secrecy and concealment, in other words, of the opacity of other minds, affect everyday social interactions. Nevertheless, Throop does not vote for a strong reading: "That there are such pressures to maintain a nontransparent rendering of one's inner life is not to say, therefore, that individuals are not interested in determining the content of others' subjective states" (2008, p. 418). Throop repeatedly emphasizes this (cf. 2008, 2011).

On the basis of Throop's account of Yap people, I have tried to argue that in spite of strong cultural norms to enact "expressive opacity", people imagine what might be going on in others and speculate about it. I have tried to argue that people on Yap can predict other people's actions because people should announce them. Therefore, an important function of what theory of mind is supposed to be developed for, namely, prediction, is differently realized on Yap, at least in many common everyday situations. Furthermore, the constant necessity to announce future actions and justify past ones forces people to think before acting. This necessity requires people to represent themselves as always being in the minds of others, as being under constant scrutiny. This requires not only perspective taking, which is part of certain definitions of empathy (see chapter 3), it also constitutes a more basic form of intersubjectivity, since the continuous experience of others' scrutiny makes them implicitly present, so to speak, in an individuals' own actions and speech acts.

#### *4.1.10 Tzotzil Maya, Southern Mexico*

Opacity claims were also observed in Central America. Kevin Groark's research among the Tzotzil Maya in Southern Mexico is probably the most elaborate and original one in this context. For this reason, I will also outline his work in more detail. Although his work was not published in the issue of Anthropological Quarterly on the opacity of other minds, but in publications that focus on empathy (Groark, 2008, in press), Groark has a great deal to say about opacity. Groark explicitly speaks of "social opacity" (cf. 2008). He describes both how Tzotzil Mayan *establish* social opacity and which countermeasures they design to provide empathic access in the light of social opacity.

According to Groark, Tzotzil Mayan believe that how people present themselves in public is not congruent with what is really going on in them. This reminds us of Stasch's account of the Korowai and Throop's description of Yap people. Behind people's social presentation lies "an unknowable heart of experience that is morally ambiguous, and possibly dangerous" (Groark, 2008, p. 434). Tzotzil Mayan believe that suppressed negative emotions fill other person's hearts. Therefore, they think of others' interiority as "an inner world of self-centered, antisocial feelings, desires, and motivations that press for expression" (ibid.). This belief leads people to the conviction that one cannot trust in what is publicly displayed, as such display reflects nothing more than general norms of comportment. Against this background, it is not surprising that Tzotzil Mayans hold opacity claims and consider the knowledge of what is really going on in another person to be difficult or impossible. Mayan people "posit a radical interiority, a largely occluded core of deep subjectivity that remains masked in everyday

social life” (ibid., p. 428). According to Groark, this leads to elaborate strategies for concealing inner states as well as to countermeasures designed to provide access to them (cf. 2008).

Let us first have a look at the strategies designed to conceal inner states. Haviland and Haviland said that living in the neighbouring Zinacantec community involves “constant circumspect hiding” (1982, p. 336). This is exactly what Groark describes for the Tzotzil Maya as well. According to him, “wary yet polite concealment” (Groark, 2008, p. 434) structures everyday interactions. Tzotzil Mayans occlude their subjectivity intentionally and rely on a “conversational style of surface courtesy”, or, in other words, on a “conventionalized positive politeness” (ibid., 436). In doing so, surface clues that might reflect inner states disappear. Like on Yap, Tzotzil Mayans demonstrate an “opaque exterior” (Throop, 2008, p. 415), which results in “a heigthened sensitivity of social life and the relative difficulty of triangulating in on the motives and emotional states of others based on overt social interactions” (ibid., p. 436). Opaque exteriors thus frustrate the possibility “to directly infer the speaker’s inner state” (ibid.). The expression “directly infer” is interesting here. After the analyses in chapter 2, it should be clear that it is more accurate to say that opaque exteriors frustrate the direct *perception* of another’s mental states. As they cannot be perceived directly (or only rarely), inference based on other evidence is not frustrated but needed. According to Groark, such a “polarized view of social experience leads to a constant preoccupation with the degree of concordance between surface appearances and inner motivations” (ibid., p. 435) and therefore to a “constant monitoring” of others (ibid., 434). Moreover, imaginative speculations about what another might really feel and think are encouraged. In a place where people present themselves with opaque exteriors and develop strategies to frustrate any attempt of others to know what might be going on in oneself, it seems justified to say that other minds appear to be opaque – they are, to use the terminology of the first chapter, treated as if lying behind an opaque barrier. One might expect mindguessing-practices to be quite common in such a cultural environment. Indeed, Groark observes “a marked preoccupation with questions of surface and depth, inner and outer, and public and private” (ibid., p. 428).

There are, however, specific domains in which transparent modes of self-disclosure are common and even expected. For example, Groark mentions “that we see some of the most direct expression of “honest’’ emotion and empathic connection” (ibid., p. 441) in prayer. Not only do people present themselves in transparent ways towards the deities, they are also self-disclosing with respect to family members who might be present. In this context is “full empathic knowing of one’s inner states expected and experienced” (ibid.).

Another exception to the common opaque modes of interaction can be found in the relationship between patients and traditional curers (*j'ilol*), who have privileged access to their patients mental states and can expect them to present their problems in a transparent manner. In these encounters, "open communication and empathic knowing take place, and through the process of ritualized "confession," an enhanced understanding of the inner states and motivations of others is facilitated" (ibid.). In this relationship, it is in diagnosis and consequent treatment where "interpersonal attunement and empathic knowing is played out most dramatically" (ibid.). The diagnostic power of the *j'ilol* "lies in the precision and accuracy of his social discernment" (ibid., p. 442). This becomes understandable since many sufferings that would, in Western contexts, be diagnosed as "psychosomatic", have their origins in the wider social environment of a patient. Tzotzil Mayan presume antipathy as characterizing a great part of the social world. Malevolent others, however, are not merely imagined, they are "experienced in the form of sickness, misadventure, and death" (ibid., p. 443).

For Mayans, the heart is the respository of thought, feeling, and memory. The heart can deliver information about these mental states via blood flow. Therefore, "the blood provides a radically embodied communication of physical and/or social disorder that only the curer can hear and understand by "listening" to the pulse. The pulse, then, provides an involuntary (and unfailingly accurate) form of self-disclosure" (ibid., p. 442). In "listening" to the pulse, the curer can transform the illness of the patient "from a mute symptom into a claim about the interpersonal world" (ibid.). This is a paradigmatic example for a bodily kind of empathy. The antipathy of others manifests in one's own body in the form of illness, which provides "opportunities for actual interpersonal attunement" (ibid., p. 443). However, "in a final ironic reversal, the curer's empathically informed diagnoses tend to confirm and reinvigorate the view that it is antipathy and ill will rather than empathy and fellow feeling that permeate and structure everyday social life" (ibid.). The only felt sense of empathic attunement, then, exists in the relationship between curer and patient itself. The transparency and empathic exchange between patient and curer, however, is an exception to the prevailing, more opaque forms of social interaction. Yet what is especially interesting in Groark's account is not so much his demonstration that there are exceptions to the rule, but his attempt to demonstrate how even opaque interactions are "empathically attuned" (ibid., p. 436). Groark argues that although others' hearts and minds might be approached as opaque and occluded, this does not mean that they are unimportant and unknowable. He thus clearly denies a strong opacity reading. This becomes also evident in a recent paper, where Groark speaks of cultural preferences for

either self-disclosive or self-occlusive forms of interaction (cf. Groark, in press). Mayans gossip, question motives and attend to dreams and somatic experiences as oblique and more indirect forms of intersubjectivity. Groark argues that the existence of opacity claims and social opacity does not lead people to become disinterested in others' inner life – rather, Tzotzil Mayan are highly occupied with the concordance or incongruence between social presentation and underlying mental states (cf. Groark, in press). It seems as if the establishment of social opacity on a societal level even *presupposes* what opacity claims deny, since it is precisely the acknowledgement of the potential knowability of others' mental states that gives rise to their artful concealment. Groark further argues that empathic processes are necessary for the everyday defenses and strategic maneuvers designed to frustrate other people's attempts to gain access to one's own subjective life. The boundaries established between people through the display of opaque exteriors are therefore "sustained by the very empathic processes they seek to deny" (2008, p. 443). In this view, interacting with other "opaque exteriors", so to speak, requires a form of empathic or affective attunement. That Groark really considers empathic processes to be at play here, is counterintuitive, since empathy normally involves getting a grasp of another person's *inner* experience. Nevertheless, Groark (2008) repeatedly speaks of empathy-like processes several times, as the following quotes demonstrate:

> even in social contexts structured around privacy and the denial of social knowing, empathic processes are widespread and underlie the everyday defenses and maneuvers designed to frustrate such "knowing" by others – in other words, a preoccupation with questions of access to one's inner states is predicated on the assumption that such access is, in fact, possible. (ibid., p. 430)

> Indeed, as we have seen, the boundaries that delimit such knowing are often sustained by the very empathic processes they seek to deny: conversational privacy and evasion are facilitated by felt respect for the boundaries of another's "inner" life (ibid., p. 443)

> Yet there is a sense in which these circumspect interactions are indeed empathically attuned, inasmuch as they reflect the reciprocal cooperative work of maintaining intact the boundaries of another`s "private" space and experience. This game of politeness, then, involves a mutual empathic awareness of the boundaries of another's privacy, and

> therefore highlights the importance of face saving and the reciprocal performance of respect in “positive politeness”. (ibid., p. 436)

One might argue that such a usage of the term empathy pushes the boundaries too much and that respecting another’s boundary requires nothing more than *tactfulness*. I think that this objection is indeed justified in many cases. Smooth everyday interactions can be regulated via general norms of comportment (tactfulness being one such norm), and the corresponding rules might allow for social interactions without the necessity to engage in empathic processes. However, I think that Groark’s interpretation is correct in situations where norms of comportment do not provide sufficient orientation for how to behave. As a matter of fact, we do sometimes not know what tactful behaviour in a specific situation looks like. Imagine you had an imporant appointment with a colleague which cannot be postponed without causing trouble. However, an uncle of that colleague surprisingly died. You meet your colleague on the corridor and he doesn’t mention the appointment with you. What is tactful behaviour in this situation? Asking whether the appointment is still valid might be impolite and not very sensitive. In order to determine whether such a question is possible, you need to consider former experiences with this person as well as his current nonverbal cues, his facial expression and posture, you need to weigh and evaluate each word of the conversation and check whether it reveals something about how sad your colleague really is and so forth. Instead of *feeling into* someone in the original sense of the term empathy, respecting the boundary of the other’s feelings requires a “*feeling onto”* this boundary, i.e., a form of attunement. Although attunement is not the same as empathy, it might *presuppose* empathy in order to determine where the demarcation of the other’s psychic boundary actually begins. In the given example, you must know something about the other’s inner experience, you must determine how deeply he is affected by the death of his uncle in order to be able to respect the boundary of his grief. Groark also speaks of “negative empathy” that reflects the understanding that too accurate a knowing of others’ inner states might be experienced as impingement or violation and argues that encounters among the Tzotzil are not unempathic – at an affective level, they are experienced as highly empathically attuned (personal communication).

A final interesting aspect of Groark’s work is his attempt to develop a “multimodal” approach to intersubjectivity that considers the whole “relational field” (cf. Groark, in press). Since others’ minds are difficult to know in Tzotzil everyday life, people try to get access to other people’s inner life from domains that are normally not considered to provide information

about others, namely, one's own somatic responses as well as dream experience (cf. Groark, in press). According to Groark, Tzotzil Mayan are hypervigilant and attend to their own body since its sensations are considered to point into the social world, indicating ill will and negative intentions directed at oneself. Let me shortly mention that both domains are subject to projective processes, dream experiences maybe even more than bodily sensations. Although one's bodily responses as well as one's dream experiences might be sensitive enough to really reveal something about the other, they might also be the mere result of projection onto others – especially in the light of a society where "a presumed antipathy…pervades the general view of the contours of the social world" (Groark, 2008, p. 443).

Groark is aware of the fact that his attempt to include "fantasies of intersubjectivity" (in press) into research on intersubjectivity might be reproached for mixing up projective processes with accurate assessment of what other people feel and think. For Groark, however, the accuracy-aspect is value-laden and does not even capture the majority of *our* everyday encounters which are just as full of projection and fantasies about the other as in other locales. Therefore, he opts "for a minimalist position, in which intersubjectivity is understood as *an always-present and basic aspect of any interactive field constituted by two or more subjects, regardless of the accuracy of the intersubjective processes at work, or the abilities of the parties to relate to one another as unique subjectivities*" (Groark, in press). In opting for such a minimalist position, he manages to include projective processes and fantasies about the other into research on intersubjectivity and takes the wind out of the sails of those critics who think that accuracy is important. Although Groark is certainly right in emphasizing how much our normal everyday encounters are shaped by projective processes, the question remains whether this adds anything to a research field which is primarily interested in how we come to understand others *as* others. I think that understanding others as others implies at least a certain extent of accuracy. The problem with projection is that it appears like mindreading, since one immediately knows what the other is up to, as if telepathy was at play. But the problem is that you are actually reading your own mind. Nevertheless, projective processes seem to be an influential factor in intersubjective encounters among the Tzotzil as well as in some places of the Pacific. Like Tzotzil Mayans, Asabano interpret certain bodily signs as indicating something about others (Lohmann, 2011). Stasch tells us that Korowai readily "attribute to others thoughts of ill-regard" (2008, p. 444) without any evidence for doing so, and Lepowksy (2011) reports projective processes among the Vanatinai.

Summing up, Groark reports opacity claims from a very different region, namely, the highlands of Central America. Groark doesn't vote for a strong opacity reading and interprets the opacity of other minds among the Tzotzil Maya as a cultural emphasis on "purposefully-occluded selves" (in press). Importantly, Groark's work adds two if not three potentially new usages of the term empathy. First, Groark argues that empathic processes are also at play when people interact with opaque exteriors, so to speak. Second, Groark provides interesting examples of bodily empathy where others' negative intentions are felt in one's own body while somatic sensations are interpreted as telling something about others. Finally, Groark anticipates the critique that such a kind of "bodily empathy" might be nothing more than projection by arguing that projective processes and fantasies about others should not be dismissed since they are pervasive in many everyday interactions and encounters across cultures.

## 4.2 Summary and conclusions

In this chapter, I have tried to provide a summary of contributions that deal with the opacity of other minds phenomenon as well as with local forms of empathy. All of the authors cited above report opacity claims. However, they appear to interpret them in a slightly different way, either as a cultural dispreference for talking about what another might think (Schieffelin, 2008), as pro-autonomy claims (Stasch, 2008; Lepowsky, 2011) or as evidence for a pervasive suspiciousness (Groark, 2008). Importantly, all of them interpret opacity claims in a weak sense, which is also supported by the fact that many authors emphasize their context-specificity.

### *4.2.1 Opacity claims*

In his afterword to the contributions in *Anthropological Quarterly* on the opacity of other minds, Webb Keane states that the opacity claim has "commonly been treated as an assertion about psychology" (2008, pp. 473-474), while the papers in the issue of Anthropological Quarterly "make it very clear that it is perhaps not about psychology at all, or at least that it is also about a great deal more than that" (ibid., p. 474). Contemplating over the different accounts, Keane says that the opacity claim "is surely a metalinguistic claim about the relations between public evidence and private states" (ibid.). With reference to the contributions of Alan Rumsey and Bambi Schieffelin, he specifies this and speaks of a

"metapragmatic claim", i.e. a claim "about acts of revealing and acts of concealing and how those are or are not to be taken as evidence for private states" (ibid.).

Keane comments that opacity claims refer more to the important capacity to hide one's inner feelings. This fits well with the empirical examples provided by Robbins (2008) and Rumsey (2008), as both focus on the practice of confession. While confessing, people stop hiding what is going on in them and make themselves transparent. They deliberately lose the power to keep hidden what is going on inside of them. The focus of these accounts "is not on the knowability of inner thoughts, as an epistemological problem, but on the capacity to hide them, as a practical, moral, and even political problem" (ibid., p. 477). The importance to hide inner feelings is also stressed among the Vanatinai (Lepowsky, 2011), in Yap (Throop, 2008, 2011) and among the Tzotzil Maya (Groark, 2008, in press). Keane (2008) concludes:

> So why should it be shameful to hear people talk about their inner thoughts? In many other cases here, it seems to be because you are not just intruding on someone's interior or private space but you being made witness to the embarrassment of seeing them lose that ability to keep hidden what they ought to have kept hidden. The problem is not psychological, or at least not epistemological. The problem concerns a person's capacity to hide their inner thoughts from others. It is not that inner thoughts are inherently unknowable, but that they ought to be unspeakable. (ibid., p. 477)

Keane does not endorse the idea that the existence of opacity claims forces a rethinking of Western scientific ideas in psychology:

> But in the final instance these papers do not undertake the kind of frontal assault on Western psychology that such an argument seems to call for. Robbins essentially proposes this position and then in the end pulls back from it. And I think none of the papers in fact does make a direct challenge to familiar Western psychological claims. (2008, p. 474)

As a consequence, the question for Keane is not so much the status of ToM in those communities – it is "what people in Melanesia think one should do about those other minds" (ibid., p. 475).

I do not want to ignore a critical voice at this point. Anthropologist Laurence Goldman, who was working in Papua New Guinea among the Huli, is sceptical of opacity claims in general. According to Goldman, what becomes clear when reading ethnographic extracts where

opacity claims were made, "is that the reports of reluctance to judge and speculate about others' 'minds' has not necessarily emerged from the study of naturally occurring conversation, but rather seems based on the *reactions of informants in the context of anthropologists' enquiries and interrogations*" (1993, p. 283). In this view, they would not be more than a consistent pattern of how people react to an anthropologists curious questions, or in Goldman's words: "What is reflected is an interactional norm consequent on a particular fieldwork methodology, not a conclusion about any orientation to 'mind' in the culture" (ibid.). In the same line, Duranti suspects that our "asking people to tell us what they imagine that others are thinking might be like asking them to spy for us" (2008, p. 493).

So is there a reason at all to further pursue the question raised in the introduction whether opacity doctrines force a rethinking of topics such as theory of mind and empathy (Robbins & Rumsey, 2008)? Not only are there no strong opacity readings among the anthropological accounts presented above – it might even turn out that opacity claims are nothing more than a mere reaction to anthropological enquiries. However, I think there is still good reason to pursue the initial questions. Let me explain why. In a footnote, Stasch discusses Goldman's criticism and finally objects to it:

> But when a large sample of consultants consistently use a certain verbal formula in response to a culturally-obtuse ethnographer, it is unlikely that the form of this formula is determined mainly by the exogenous interactional style of the ethnographer. The consistency of the Korowai formula as people used it in conversation with me is evidence that the formula is a compelling cliché in the verbal repertoires of people I was speaking with. (2008, p. 42)

I think, however, that there are more convincing reasons why opacity claims should not be dismissed as simple reactions to anthropological enquiry. First, Goldman's critique of how opacity claims are interpreted refers to older reports. Although the form these opacity claims take is similar to the ones presented above, the discussion I refer to has evolved only recently and it would therefore be necessary to check whether Goldman's criticism does apply to the reports presented above. Second, and more importantly, the reports and empirical examples presented do not only rely on situations in which an anthropologist tried to get some answers out of his informants. For example, the observed struggles involved in practices of confession cannot easily be dismissed as being provoked by anthropological enquiry. The same is true for observed interactional patterns between children and caregivers among the Bosavi

(Schieffelin, 2008) or for the feeling of disgust reported by Urapmin people when witnessing another person confessing (Robbins, 2008). The whole debate apparently is about much more than the simple occurrence of those claims in the light of an anthropologist's questions.

But even if we can object to Goldman's criticism: why should one pursue the question whether opacity claims force a rethinking of theory of mind or Western approaches to empathy when Keane concludes that "none of the papers in fact does make a direct challenge to familiar Western psychological claims" (2008, p. 474) and nobody endorses a strong opacity reading? I think because it is still an open empirical question how these phenomena shape local forms of intersubjective understanding, including theory of mind and forms of empathy. The rejection of a strong opacity reading still leaves open the question whether theory of mind and empathy in these communities are developed, shaped and enacted differently. If Bosavi people do not speculate about mental states of others and even teach children not to do so by refraining from expansions (cf. Ochs & Schieffelin, 1994; Schieffelin, 2008), if Urapmin people even feel disgusted when hearing other people speak sincerely about their feelings (cf. Robbins, 2008) and if people on Yap island try to artfully conceal their inner feelings, why shouldn't this influence for example the onset of theory of mind development or how empathy is exercised and enacted?

This leads us to an important conclusion of this summary. Having said much on opacity *claims*, it is important to stress that they are more than simple verbal statements without further impact.[17] In some of the places mentioned above, they also reflect the importance to hide inner feelings. This is endorsed by a virtue of self-governance and enacted by artful concealment and the social presentation of an opaque exterior.[18] In a sense, the social presentation of an opaque exterior can be understood as a nonverbal correlate of the opacity claim. With this in mind, it seems justified to analyse in more detail what these reports tell us about mindreading and empathy. Before, however, let us have a closer look at the "nonverbal opacity claims": the opaque exteriors people in some locales present in public.

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[17] Note, however, that both Feinberg's and Lepowsky's interpretation of opacity claims are different. Both suggest that opacity claims make something explicit which is, in a very literal sense, true for every society: that one cannot know for sure what is in another person's mind, at least in most cases. Although both Feinberg and Lepowsky provide examples concerning the different shaping of empathy and intersubjective encounters in Anuta and Vanatinai, they might object to my conclusion that opacity claims are more than verbal statements without further impact.

[18] Again, there are clear exceptions. The Korowai (Stasch, 2008) and the Bosmun (von Poser, 2009; forthcoming) from Papua New Guinea as well as Anutans from the Solomon Islands (Feinberg, 2011) are reported to value and engage in transparent expression.

#### *4.2.2 Opaque exteriors*

In the above review of the anthropological reports, we repeatedly came across the observation that people in some locales artfully conceal their inner states, that they publicly present an opaque exterior or a "conventionalized positive politeness" (Groark, 2008, p. 436). Goffman famously wrote about the presentation of self in everyday life (1959). Let us reflect in a bit more detail on the notion of opaque exteriors. Watzlawick and Beavin (1967) say that "it can be summarily stated that *all* behavior, not only the use of words, is communication (which is not the same as saying that behavior is *only* communication), and since there is no such thing as non-behavior, it is impossible *not* to communicate" (ibid., p. 5). If it is impossible not to communicate and if it is impossible not to behave, then it seems reasonable to hypothesize that it is also impossible not to express. In this view, the artful concealment of private mental states and the demonstration of an opaque exterior is not simply an absence of expression – on the contrary, it expresses a cultural value and *has* a meaning for all members of society. It is a communicative act that conveys the very fact that mental states are and should be artfully concealed. Note, however, that artfully concealed and therefore unexpressed anger, to cite an example, is not simply an inner experience of anger that is not expressed. I do not think that it is very adequate to say that we experience an inner emotion and either express it or not, since this would imply that the inner experience of an emotion is completely independent from its expression. Unexpressed anger is not simply the same felt inner anger as if it were expressed. Unexpressed anger *feels* differently. If you are sad and struggle to maintain your composure, the inner experience of sadness is certainly different from what you experience when you allow yourself to burst into tears. If we take this insight seriously, it might also help us to understand the relationship between mindreading attempts and opaque exteriors from a different angle. Assessing someone's inner state is either facilitated by deliberate expression or made more difficult by self-governance, by the presentation of an opaque exterior. But a successful assessment of another's mental state in the latter case would, if I am correct, actually assess something *different*. What is important here is that the demonstration of opaque exteriors does not only make things difficult for those who try to assess another's mental state. A culture that values the enactment of opacity might also influence how and what those *presenting* opaque exteriors feel.

Finally, artful concealment is never perfect. A person who feels sad appears to others as a person struggling not to express sadness, an angry person as a person that struggles not to express anger, and so forth. Both the struggle and the emotion people are struggling with might be perceivable in the other's observable attempt to conceal these states. It is precisely

the fact that humans are so good at directly perceiving what might be going on in someone which makes the successful concealment of one's inner states an artistic accomplishment. Leudar and Costall put it like this way: "People can of course lie and occasionally hide their feelings, beliefs and intentions. However, it is *hiding* one's experience – keeping it private – that is the real accomplishment, not *revealing* it" (2009c, p. 21).

### *4.2.3 Opacity reports and 'mindreading'*

Although opacity claims consist in the assertion that one cannot know what is going on in another person's mind, few anthropologists make the link to the opposite idea which stresses the possibility of 'mindreading'. While most of the contributions summarized above talk about opacity and empathy, they do sometimes use the term mindreading without providing a clear definition and without clearly distinguishing it from other forms of empathic knowing. Feinberg, however, in line with Hollan (2011), says that empathy is not the same as mindreading and defines empathy as "an educated guess based on empirical evidence. If one guesses right, the other person issues signals that confirm the accuracy of the initial hypothesis" (ibid., p. 163). This definition seems to fit quite well with what I have called mindguessing in the previous chapter. But if Feinberg takes this to be a definition of empathy, then what is mindreading according to him? Feinberg does not provide a definition for it, but we can logically conclude that mindreading is not a matter of guessing based on empirical evidence for him.

Hollan (2011) only mentions that "empathy is so often characterized and conceptualized as the mind reading capabilities of the empathizer alone" (ibid., p. 197) and emphasizes that our ability to understand others does strongly depend on whether they want to be understood and whether they provide us with appropriate cues. This is an important remark. But whether Hollan thinks of empathy and mindreading as equivalent or whether he argues that what distinguishes both is precisely the mutual character of empathic encounters, i.e. their dependency on the others' willingness to be empathized with, remains an open question. Yet if this *were* his way of distinguishing both, the resulting account would still be a bit unsatisfying, since what distinguished mindreading from empathy would only depend on the other's willingness to be understood.

With regard to Urapmin people, Robbins points out how "difficult it is for a woman to ask that another person hear her speech as a reflection of her mind and how shameful it is for a man who agrees to listen to her to treat her speech in this way" (2008, p. 427). This practice serves, according to Robbins, "as evidence of how marked sincere speech and mind-reading

interpretation were (and still are) in traditional Urapmin understanding" (ibid.). I have already argued above that Robbins' use of the term mindreading is odd, since mindreading in cases of sincere speech is rather superfluous. On the contrary, it seems that 'mindreading' – however one might define the term – rather comes into play in cases of insincere speech. But Robbins curiously uses the term for a situation where someone is engaged in sincere speech, thus providing the impression that it needs more than taking the uttered words at face value.

For Stasch, the Korowai assertion that someone has his own thoughts "is an argument against an opposite idea people took to be implied in my questions, an idea of mind-reading" (2008, p. 444). This sounds odd, since mindreading is considered to be necessary precisely *because* people have their own thoughts. Stasch, however, interprets the Korowai formula that people have their own thoughts as a pro-autonomy claim (cf. Lepowsky, 2011). From this point of view, Stasch's words make sense, since a radical view on others' autonomy might lead to a dispreference for mindreading or mindguessing. In saying that his informants quite often answered his questions "about reasons for others' actions with statements of those people's motives" and that they "answered questions about others' future actions with outright predictions of what those others would do" (Stasch, 2008, p. 444), Stasch implicitly works with the typical definition of mindreading/ToM, since both the explanatory and predictive aspects are constitutive for many common definitions of ToM.

Summing up, we can conclude that the anthropological use of the term mindreading is rather vague and theoretically not very elaborated. But if we apply the conceptual tools developed in the second chapter to the different reports sketched in this chapter, it becomes obvious that contextreading, direct perception, mental state attribution, mental state talk, mental state inference and mindguessing actually *do* occur. There is no need to argue for the universal occurrence of contextreading, direct perception and mental state attribution. Contextreading, defined as the ability to make sense of situations, circumstances and the course of events without the necessity to infer mental states, for example by considering rules or norms, is an important ability in all societies of the world. Emotions are expressed everywhere, and if they are not (or less), this requires artful concealment, which must be trained precisely because emotions do press for expression, precisely because they might show up in one's face as soon as one loses control. Therefore, emotion terms exist everywhere, and as soon as they are used, either publicly or silently, mental state attribution and mental-state-talk occur, although the latter might be tabooed and restricted to the domain of gossip. Moreover, Ku Waru "make inferences about other people's intentional states" (Rumsey, 2008, p. 470), Kaluli "obviously interpret and assess one another's available behaviors and internal states" (Schieffelin, 1990,

p. 72) although they are not acceptable as topics of talk, and Korowai know that people think silently without speaking (Stasch, 2008, p. 484) and are "wary in advance what others will infer or speculate about their own intentions" (ibid., p. 451). Anutans "show intense concern about each other's "real" intentions" (Feinberg, 2011, p. 156), they "are concerned with feelings and intentions as predictors of future behavior" (ibid., p. 162), they "frequently formulate hypotheses about what others are thinking and feeling" (ibid., p. 157) and "they try to interpret the intentions behind others' speech acts" (ibid.). Vanatinai "conjecture at length, in exacting detail, based upon a range of external cues, about what others are thinking and feeling" (Lepowsky, 2011, p. 49).

Summing up, a great deal of what is usually associated with the term 'mindreading' is common in those places. Some reports even give the impression that attempts to assess others' internal states might be hightened, since people in these locales are especially concerned with the level of congruence between outer appearance and social presentation on the one hand and inner motivations and intentions on the other. For example, Groark says about the effect of opaque exteriors among the Tzotzil: "The interlocutor's ability to directly infer the speaker's inner state is thereby frustrated, confounding direct access and encouraging imaginative speculations about what the speaker is really feeling and thinking" (2008, p. 436). In other words, the constant monitoring of others' opaque exteriors might even result in heightened theorizing about what might *really* be going on *in* someone.

Finally, it seems as if false belief understanding is the only element of the conceptual tool kit that cannot be proven by a closer look at the existing anthropological literature.

#### *4.2.4 Opacity reports and empathy*

At this point, let us reconsider what has been said on empathy in chapter 3 and bring it together with the results of this chapter. The analysis of the different reports from Central America and the Pacific islands makes things even more complex, but like Batson, I hope "to reduce confusion by recognizing complexity" (Batson, 2009, p. 8). Let us have a look again at Batson's eight uses of the term empathy.

Concept 1: Knowing another person's internal state, including his or her thoughts and feelings
Concept 2: Adopting the posture or matching the neural responses of an observed other
Concept 3: Coming to feel as another person feels
Concept 4: Intuiting or projecting oneself into another's situation
Concept 5: Imagining how another is thinking and feeling

Concept 6: Imagining how one would think and feel in the other's place
Concept 7: Feeling distress at witnessing another person's suffering
Concept 8: Feeling for another person who is suffering

This list covers some of the usages we encountered in the anthropological reports above. Interestingly, however, it does not cover all, as we will see in a moment. Several of the anthropological authors cited above say that the people they studied want to know and come to know others' internal states (concept one) in spite of opacity claims. Asabano (Lohmann, 2011) as well as Banabans (Hermann, 2011) imaginatively take the perspective of others – an example for concept six. Groark (2008) explains how social opacity among the Tzotzil Maya gives rise to imaginative speculations about what others might feel and think (concept five). Hermann (2011) also tells us that Banabans represent themselves as having a special capacity to show pity, which at least fits quite well with concepts 7 and 8.
But the anthropological reports do also add some new aspects. Hollan and Throop remark:

> Despite the attention recently paid to the opacity doctrine, it is equally important to remember that throughout the Pacific we find a strong cultural value placed on developing and maintaining emotionally positive and loving ties among people, especially among those designated as kin. (2011, p. 10)

Indeed, many contributions from the Pacific share the observation of a "pan-Pacific emotional idiom of 'love-compassion-concern-pity'" (Hollan & Throop, 2011, p. 11). Picking up this terminology and for the sake of brevity, I will henceforth speak of the LCCP-complex, or simply LCCP. In the reports presented above, we came across local forms of LCCP called *aropa* in Anuta (Feinberg, 2011), *te nanoang* among the Banabans of Fiji (Hermann, 2011) and *runguy* on Yap island (Throop, 2008). Throop says that this term "has a broad semantic range that at times appears to overlap with the concept of 'empathy' but that I gloss here as 'concern/pity/compassion'" (ibid., p. 408). With respect to the Anutan *aropa*, it is worth mentioning that very similar concepts are common in many other Polynesian communities across the Pacific (*aloha*, Hawaii; *aroha*, Maori in New Zealand; *alofa*, Samoa, see next chapter). Although Batson's concepts seven and eight do cover aspects of LCCP, they do not fully grasp it, since LCCP means much more than feeling distress when confronted with another's suffering or feeling for a another person who is suffering. The local concepts belonging to the LCCP-complex are understood as active orientations towards other persons.

They do not primarily focus on what might be going on inside the empathizer or empathizee, i.e. his feelings. Instead, they have a strong normative dimension. Hollan and Throop's observation that LCCP is especially common among kin is an important one, since it points to the fact that what we consider to be an effect of an individual's empathic process (caring, giving, providing help, etc.) might also be realized via kinship ties and corresponding norms. Nevertheless, it seems difficult to argue that LCCP might be a Pacific equivalent of empathy, since LCCP covers much of what we consider to be a *consequence* of empathy. So why should it not be a consequence of what we consider to be empathy in those places as well?

Note, however, that empathic-like knowledge is also considered as a possible means to harm, shame or humiliate others in some places (e.g. Briggs, 2008; Groark, 2008). Therefore, the anthropological reports provide examples both for positive and negative forms of empathy. However, this does not necessarily support the view that empathy is basically neutral. As argued in the previous chapter, empathy might still be a primarily compassionate response that can be inhibited and transformed in order to be used for ill means. I will again come back to this point in the chapter on Samoa.

Apart from the LCCP-complex, there are other original anthropological contributions to the research field on empathy. Groark's (2008) idea that interactions with other people who try to conceal their inner states might require something like an empathic attunement in order to respect their psychic privacy is new and, I think, useful.

Moreover, some anthropologists report a bodily form of empathy. In some locales, people use their own somatic reactions and bodily resonance as a source of information about the social world and as a starting point for imaginative processes (Groark, 2008; Lohmann, 2011). Likewise, people might attend very carefully to others' bodily cues (Throop, 2008). If it is culturally prescribed to show a 'good face' in public or to enact expressive opacity (Throop, 2008), people might become hypervigilant to their own as well as others' bodily reactions. All this is important, since one's own bodily resonance and the monitoring of subtle cues on another's body might be what compensates for the lack of direct expression in places where opaque exteriors are presented. At this point, let me present another definition of empathy I did not mention in the previous chapter. It is a definition that is quite popular among anthropologists (cf. Hollan & Throop, 2011), and this is not by accident. According to Jodi Halpern (2001, 2003), empathy is a kind of emotional reasoning in which someone emotionally resonates with another's experience while simultaneously trying to imagine the other person's perspective. She describes "empathy in terms of a listener using her emotional associations to provide a context for imagining the distinct experiences of another person"

(2001, xv). According to Halpern, the own emotional associations or resonance shapes the way for the following process of imagination. Expressive behaviour, which, for example is an important cause of empathic responses in the account of Bischof-Köhler (2012), does only rarely tell very much about someone's inner states in places were self-governance is valued and expected. This is not to say, however, that people do not affect others on a more basic level, i.e., on the level of bodily and emotional resonance. I think Halpern's definition is so popular among anthropologists precisely because it manages to detect and conceptualize empathy in places where people show an opaque exterior. Halpern's focus on bodily resonances and the imaginations triggered by them allows for empathy even when people are faced with opaque exteriors. Very similar views on empathy can be found in the contributions above by Lohmann (2011) and Hermann (2011).

Another new aspect brought forward by some anthropological contributions are projective processes. I have criticized this since I believe that the ongoing research on how we come to understand other minds is explicitly about how we accurately assess *another's* mind. However, it is an interesting aspect, since projection might give rise to an illusory kind of empathy. If I project hostility onto another person, I will experience him as hostile. This gives rise to the treacherous impression that I might have assessed what is going on in the other – from this point of view, the result of projection can falsely feel as if it were the result of an empathic process. But what if the other identifies with my projection? In this case, the mental state I project onto the other coincides with the mental state the other is experiencing. Melanie Klein's (1946) famous work on projective identification, from this point of view, allows to understand projection as a form of empathic knowing if – and only if – the other identifies with the mental state projected onto him. We could call this *projective empathy*. Hollan and Throop confirm this:

> Projections may sometimes coincide with the other's emotional state and therefore resemble empathy in certain respects. But more often they will not coincide and may themselves become a major source of misunderstanding among people, being instead interpreted as evidence of the lack of empathy. (2011, p. 3)

Since the coincidence between what one projects and what the other feels is rather the exception, Hollan and Throop think that the "concern with accuracy, the willingness, indeed the necessity, to alter one's impression of another's emotional state as one engages with the

other and learns more about his or her perspective, is what distinguishes empathy from simple projection" (ibid.).

A final important contribution will be Jeannette Mageo's account of empathy in the chapter on empathy in Samoa (chapter 5). Aspects of her account, however, are already covertly present in some of the contributions presented in this chapter. Throop (2008) tells us that the feeling of *runguy* also binds a father to his children (ibid., p. 409). Hermann (2011) says about the Banabans that "compassion is the basis for their capacity to bond socially with others" (ibid., p. 31). Among the Ku Waru, "it is said to be possible for each member of a couple to know what is in the other's mind because it is the same as what is in their own" (Rumsey, 2008, p. 465). What these quotes have in common is the idea that there might be a link between empathy or aspects of it and attachment. This idea is made explicit by Mageo (2011), who thinks of empathy as "re-directed attachment" (ibid., p. 69), as "an as-if form of attachment" (ibid., p. 72).

Summing up, we can say that the anthropological contributions to empathy research offer new and interesting perspectives – perspectives that make things even more complicated, as they broaden the scope of meanings of the term empathy even more. As a result, we can add the five following concepts to Batson's original list.

Concept 9: LCCP-complex
Concept 10: empathic attunement, negative empathy (*sensu* Groark)
Concept 11: bodily empathy
Concept 12: projective processes and projective empathy
Concept 13: empathy as redirected attachment, as an as-if form of attachment

In the previous chapter, I have argued that we should distinguish empathy from ToM/mindreading and suggested that it might be worth asking whether empathy really coincides with simulation or whether there is more to it. Aspects that might be relevant for getting a clear notion of what constitutes empathy in contrast to 'mindreading' and simulation, are the idea that the objects of empathic processes are typically emotions, that empathy involves a sharing of these emotions, that it is triggered by direct perception and that it gives us the possibility to understand *how* another person feels.

What can we, on a more general level, learn from the five derived concepts just mentioned? First of all, the anthropological contributions allow for a conceptualization of empathy in places where opacity doctrines are common. On Yap (Throop, 2008) or in the highlands of

Central America (Groark, 2008), one might wonder how people can ever assess how another feels when people do neither talk about their feelings nor express them in their face or comportment. By providing concepts 10-12, however, the anthropological contributions offer a solution to this conundrum. According to Bischof-Köhler, empathic reactions "may be caused by the expressive behavior of the other or by the person's situation" (2012, p. 41). The anthropological contributions refine this picture. Groark argued how even the attunement to people who show an opaque exterior necessitates empathic-like processes. In the examples of bodily empathy, empathic processes can start without another's expressive behaviour and in absence of situational cues via one's own bodily resonance. And the examples of projective processes, although they might be something very different from accurately assessing another's mental state, are at least a means to shape and direct intersubjective processes despite of opaque exteriors. Therefore, concepts 10-12 allow us to think of how empathic processes might look like in cultures where more opaque forms of interaction are pervasive.

Concepts 11 and 12 can also help us to arrive at a more general definition of empathy. Note that bodily reactions are also subject to projective processes. One can have bodily reactions even in the absence of others. Lohmann (2011) tells us that Asabano interpret sweat without exertion as indicating that someone will soon arrive (*isi'sitibu*). I would argue that it is highly questionable whether our own bodily reactions can tell us anything about others if they are not present. Interpreting own somatic phenomena in such a way is rather projection than something that deserves to be called empathy. In other words, bodily empathy seems to be possible mainly in cases where the other person is present. Moreover, projective identification seems to depend on another's presence. Therefore, both bodily empathy and illusory empathy that results from projective identification support my argument from the previous chapter that there are good reasons to use the term empathy only for real human-human encounters.

Finally, concept 13 suggests that empathy might have something to do with bonding, with attachment and kin, roughly speaking. The cross-cultural association of empathy with the LCCP-complex seems to support this view, since love, concern, care and compassion are paradigmatically enacted in primary attachment relationships between caregiver and children. We will hear more about this in the next chapter on Samoa. Yet if it makes at least partially sense to think of empathy as an as-if form of attachment or redirected attachment (Mageo, 2011), then we would not expect it to be morally neutral, at least not primarily. This is not to say however, that it cannot be used for ill means as well: the world is full of sad stories which prove that caregivers can abuse their children's attachment to them. Both attachment and empathy can be used for malicious means – however, their origin and function is rather tied to

LCCP. I think that we now have at least some reasonable arguments that support my attempt to restrict empathy to real encounters and to consider it as a basically compassionate response.[19] The link between empathy and attachment will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

All this said, we still have some reason to conclude that empathy is made more difficult in places where opaque exteriors are publicly presented. At the end of chapter 3, I defined empathy as *a primarily compassionate reaction to another's expressed emotional state that leads us to understand the 'how'-aspect of another's experience via a combination of imaginative processes and sharing*. Against the background of the anthropological reports summarized in this chapter, let us now rethink and refine this definition in order to give it more cross-cultural validity. Empathy seems to be a primarily compassionate reaction which normally results in behaviours associated with LCCP. It is triggered by another's expressed emotional states and one's own bodily resonances and somatic reactions to them. Such a bodily form of empathy is also possible in places where people demonstrate an opaque exterior. These resonances give rise to imaginative processes that help to understand the other's point of view and the 'how'-aspect of his experience, which results in a willingness to share the other's emotion. This sharing makes it very likely that the behavioural inclinations towards the other at the end of such an empathic process are at least minimally related to LCCP. The notion of bodily empathy allows for empathy even in places where people deliberately conceal their mental states. Yet if there is a stronger emphasis on social role and public face, then the difference between 'inside' and 'outside' automatically becomes bigger. Such a lack of congruency between inner experience and outer presentation might also enhance projective processes and speculation. Although people in such places still react towards opaque exteriors via bodily resonance and imaginative processes, these are more prone to projection and speculation than in places where people value transparent expression and sincere speech. On the other hand, a heightened preoccupation with the level of

[19] Above, I mentioned Halpern's view on empathy. According to her, own emotional associations start imaginative processes. In this view, empathy seems to be rather neutral, and one might draw on Halpern to object to my understanding of empathy. Clearly, another's anger can affect me on the level of bodily resonance and start imaginary processes aimed at understanding why the other is angry with me. Is this not an example for a neutral, non-compassionate empathic reaction which also is not inverted in order to harm others? I do not think it is. If another person is angry, and if it is a person I do normally like, then my goal of understanding his anger is aimed at reestablishing our former, more harmonious relationship. Therefore, it is compassionate. On the other hand, if I do not care about the other person (maybe because I do not know him), then understanding his anger probably mainly serves the goal to avoid his anger or its physical consequences (since he might beat me up). The fact that my body resonates with his anger and that I try to figure out why he is angry is not enough to qualify the example as an example of empathy. My attempt to understand him is not aimed at understanding the 'how'-aspect, I do not want to *share* his anger. Therefore, it is rather an example of mindguessing. Mindguessing, too, can be triggered by my own emotions. But it must be distinguished from empathy as long as I am not concerned

congruency between inner and outer might also *enhance* aspects of 'mindreading' like mindguessing or mental state talk in gossip. Moreover, presenting an opaque exterior and interacting with other people who do so requires a specific form of empathic attunement (Groark, 2008). Nevertheless, I argue that opaque exteriors make empathy more difficult, at least if we understand it as requiring the sharing of another's emotion and therefore the willingness of the empathizee.

According to the above, we can now refine our definition of empathy.

Empathy

1) is a primarily compassionate reaction which normally results in behaviours associated with LCCP
2) is triggered either by resonating with another's expressed emotional state or by one's own bodily resonances and somatic reactions towards another's opaque exterior in his or her presence
3) involves imaginative processes and sharing in order to grasp the 'how'-aspect of another's experience or empathic attunement in order to respect the boundaries of another's subjective life

I have said above that grasping how another person feels might help us to better understand him and therefore to engage in behaviours associated with LCCP. We might therefore ask how people can show LCCP in places where people empathically attune and might not be trying to grasp how it is for another to feel a certain emotion. In the next chapter, we will see that LCCP can also be realized via redirected attachment. This will help us to again refine the definition of empathy.

At the end of this chapter, the resulting picture of the opacity of other minds phenomenon is still somehow unsatisfying. People are concerned with the level of congruency both in cultures where opaque expression is valued (Yap, Tzotzil) and in cultures where transparent expression is valued (Korowai). An emphasis and focus on the effects of another's activities and actions instead of the underlying intentions can be found both in places where emotions are concealed (Yap) and in places where they are openly expressed (Anuta). Opacity claims are reported both in cultures where mental states are not a suitable object for speculation (Kaluli) and in places where people seem to engage in mindguessing, mental state talk and inferences like in Western cultures (Anuta). The resultant picture might leave one helpless. To come to grips with the complex picture of the opacity of other minds phenomenon as it emerged in this chapter, it might be helpful to focus on a single culture. Apart from the

with the how-aspect of the other's experience and as long as there is no willingness to share it.

prevalent opacity claims, it seems difficult to capture an aspect of opacity which is common to *all* the locales described above. If the opacity of other minds cannot be defined generally, then the aim must be a more modest one, namely, to clarify opacity and its relationship to ToM and empathy in one specific locale. In the remainder of this work, I will therefore focus on a single locale: the Independent State of Samoa.

# 5. Samoa

*"How much of ourselves do we hide? From the rest of the world? From ourselves even? The silent unspoken. The ghost-words that flutter around us like invisible butterflies. How much of our past do we reveal to loved ones? How much of the present do we reveal to loved ones? To ourselves even? I don't know."*

Sia Figiel, *They who do not grieve*

A lot has been said in the previous chapters on opacity, mindreading, and empathy. I have used anthropological reports from very different places in order to enrich – and complicate – our notion of empathy. By considering emically derived concepts and anthropological usages of the term, I came up with an account of empathy that might have more cross-cultural validity than the concepts common in Western places and scientific communities (cf. Batson, 2009). Although many aspects of opacity and empathy as reported by cultural anthropologists are specific for a certain region or locale, it still became evident that some aspects are shared by a variety of locales and cultures, for example the striking similarities of the asserted opacity claims or the importance to conceal and control private mental states such as emotions in order to present an appropriate public face that is in line with culturally valued norms of comportment. With respect to empathy, a focus on what we consider to be consequences of empathy (LCCP) is typical for many places. Yet while all these commonalities have been derived from different locales, the resulting model or aspects of opacity cannot easily be transferred to a new place. Such an imposition might be inappropriate for a specific place. For the rest of this work, I will therefore focus on one specific locale, namely, Samoa. In the course of the following chapters, it will become evident that Samoa is an interesting place for doing research on the relationship between opacity doctrines on the one hand and forms of 'mindreading' and empathy on the other. Cultural anthropologists have been interested in Samoa since Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (which was first published in 1928) and so there is a great amount of anthropological literature available on Samoa. Moreover, to my knowledge, there are only two locales discussed in the context of opacity doctrines where theory of mind research was done. Oberle conducted false belief studies on the Micronesian islands of Fais and Yap (2009), and Callaghan et al. (2005) presented false belief data from five different places including Samoa. Samoa therefore seems especially suited when it comes to answering the question whether opacity doctrines force a rethinking of common assumptions like theory of mind (cf. Robbins & Rumsey, 2008). Focusing on a single locale

will not only help us to develop a richer and more detailed account of what opacity in a specific place amounts to, it will also help us to spell out some of the more general and theoretical aspects which have already been mentioned in previous chapters in more detail. While the anthropological reports sketched in the previous chapter were presented *en bloc*, I will now proceed in a more structured way. After providing some very basic information on the Samoan islands, including some words on the history and social structure, I will focus on childhood in Samoa, on Samoan folk psychology and socialization practices. While the subchapter on childhood in Samoa will outline some basic or, in a sense, more structural characteristics of Samoan childhood, the chapter on Samoan folk psychology will introduce Samoan concepts of person, inner experience and behaviour. The subchapter on childhood socialization draws on both what has been said in the chapter on childhood in Samoa and Samoan folk psychology – it is, in a sense, a synthesis of these two, since socialization practices are both a fundamental part of what children experience and a transmitter as well as a reflection of Samoan folk psychology.

But first of all, Samoa must be identified as a culture that fits into the debate about the opacity of other minds. The most obvious criterion that would make Samoa a suitable candidate in this context would be the prevalence of opacity claims which, as we have seen, are reported from many different places across the Pacific. Characteristic for these claims is the assertion that one cannot know what is in another person's mind. As this chapter focuses on Samoa, I will first have to identify Samoa as a suitable candidate in this context. Ochs says that "Samoans generally display a strong dispreference for guessing at what is going on in another person's mind" (1988, p. 143). Duranti observed that "Samoans often seem to ignore the speaker's alleged intentions" (1986, p. 240) and cites his own work in Samoa as an example that documents the opacity doctrine phenomenon (2008, p. 485). Shore observed a "reluctance to discuss or pursue purely private experience" (1982, p. 149) in Samoa. Mageo said that Samoans "assert the opacity of others' minds and hearts" (2011, p. 76) and that "Samoans are generally indefinite about their own interior life and forswear the possibility of fathoming anyone else's" (1998, p. 64). Gerber stated that "Samoans frequently say, with the full core of self-evident conventional wisdom, 'we cannot know what is in another person's depth,' or 'we cannot tell what another person is thinking'" (1985, p. 133). These examples identify Samoa as a culture where opacity claims apparently do exist and make it a suitable candidate for a more detailed analysis on how opacity doctrines, ToM and empathy might be related to each other. Against this background, I will begin this chapter as outlined above with a short introduction to the Samoan islands.

## 5.1 The Samoan islands

Samoa is located in the South West Pacific and divided into two states by the 171st meridian. To the West is Independent Samoa and to the East lies the US territory of American Samoa. Independent Samoa[20] is comprised of two main islands, Upolu with the capital Apia and Savai'i. Both islands are volcanic and mountainous with rain forest covering the inner parts of the islands (see Figures 1-3). Two smaller islands are inhabited as well, Manono and Apolima.[21]

According to the preliminary count of the Samoan population on the 7th of November in 2011 by the *Samoan Bureau of Statistics* (Samoa Bureau of Statistics [SBS], 2012a), Samoa has a total population of 186.340 people, with 36.853 people living in the urban area of the capital Apia on Upolu and only 44.387 people living on the biggest island of Savai'i (ibid.).

Over a quarter of the population live in Apia. The vast majority of the population is concentrated in villages along the coastline. Savai'i is bigger than Upolu and the biggest island of all Samoas, but only about a quarter of the total population of Samoa is living here.

In the course of Samoan history, the islands were profoundly influenced by Western contact. Contact to *pālagi* (white people/Europeans) intensified after the arrival of missionary John Williams of the London Missionary Society in 1830 (Meleisea et al., 1987, pp. 43-46; Va'a, 2001, p. 48). The missionary activites were so "successful" that the original Samoan religion was virtually buried in oblivion. Nowadays, Christianity – represented by many different denominations across and within villages – plays an important part in people's everyday life as well as in public life.

In 1899, Great Britain, the United States of America and Germany settled their rivalry and territorial claims by signing a treaty which left the western islands of Savai'i and Upolu as a German colony while the eastern part (Tutuila and the Manu'a group) was put under control of the USA (Hiery, 1995, pp. 102-103; Liuaana, 2004, p.37). Till the outbreak of World War I, Samoa was under German rule. After the end of German colonial rule, it was put under full control by New Zealand as a League of Nations C class mandate (Meleisea & Schoeffel, 1983, p. 85; Hiery, 1995, p. 107; Ward & Ashcroft, 1998, p. 1; Liuaana, 2004, pp. 119-120). The Western part of Samoa finally became independent as the "Independent State of Western Samoa" in 1962. In 1997, the word "Western" was dropped (Hiery, 1995, p. 109; Meleisea

[20] Although the name Samoa historically refers to all of the islands that now belong to Independent Samoa and American Samoa, I will henceforth use the term Samoa to refer to the Independent State of Samoa. If American Samoa is meant, I will say so.

[21] Unfortunately, I cannot present one of the rare better maps of Samoa due to copyright reasons. The position and shape of the Samoan islands, however, are well illustrated in Mageo (2011).

1987; Meleisea & Schoeffel, 1983, p. 86; Ward & Ascroft, 1998, p. 1). Up until the present, the eastern part of the archipelago (American Samoa) is controlled by the United States of America as an unincorporated territory (Kreisel, 2004, p. 181; Va'a, 2001, p. 50, p. 60).

In the second half of the 20th century, many Samoans migrated overseas. As a consequence of Western influence, the mere reliance on subsistence economy in Samoa became less and less attractive. Nevertheless, subsistence economy is still important. Most Samoans who migrated overseas live in New Zealand (with a majority living in the metropolitan area of Auckland) – however, the US and Australia are further common destinations. Nowadays, about half of all Samoans live outside Samoa (Gough, 2006, p. 88; Ward & Ashcroft, 1998, p. 43).

Although Samoa was deeply influenced in the course of its history by Western culture, it still managed to maintain its own local variety of Polynesian culture which is known as *fa'a Sāmoa* (literally meaning "the Samoan way") or *aganu'u Sāmoa* (Va'a, 2001, p. 47, 2006, pp. 119-120).

**Figure 1: Southeastern Savai'i**

**Figure 2: Northern Savai'i, volcanic soil**

**Figure 3: Beach on the southern coast of Upolu.**

## 5.2 Social structure

Like other Polynesian cultures, Samoa is highly stratified and has an elaborate chiefly system (*fa'amatai*). According to Ochs, rank in Samoa "is assessed in terms of political title (e.g. chief, orator, and positions within each of these statuses), church title (pastor, deacon, etc.), age, and generation, among other variables" (1988, p. 137). Correspondingly, respect (*fa'aaloalo*) for socially higher ranking persons as well as obedience and service (*tautua*) to the community are core Samoan values.

The central unit of Samoan society is the extended family (*'āiga*), which can span up to four generations and consist of up to 30 persons (cf. Kroeber-Wolf, 1998, pp. 249-250). Every *'āiga* is headed by a *matai* (titled person). There are two main categories of *matai*: the higher ranking *ali'i* (sacred or high chiefs who claim ultimate descent from the creator god *Tagaloa-a-lagi*) and *tulāfale* (orators or talking chiefs who act as spokespersons and executive officers of the *ali'i*). Several *'āiga* make up a village (*nu'u*). Samoan villages are associated with a section of land and sea. They stretch from the mountain ridges in the islands' interiors down to the coast and the lagoons. Beyond the villages and more inland are the plantations, where cocoa, coconuts and taro are cultivated. Each *'āiga* can use a certain proportion of these areas for subsistence and residential use. The *nu'u* as a whole is governed by the council of *matai* of the village (*fono a le nu'u*) which traditionally combines executive, legislative and judicial powers. Still today, many issues are settled on this level.

In contrast to closed houses, traditional open-built *fale* (Samoan house) with thatched roofs have neither exterior nor interior walls (see Figures 4 and 5).

**Figure 4: Traditional open-built *fale* (Samoan house)**

**Figure 5: View from the inside of an open-built *fale*, photographs of ancestors on top of the columns**

Family households are spatially organized together in a single compound. A number of *fale* for different members of the extended family and for different functional uses (e.g. kitchen) constitute the *‘āiga*’s traditional residential site. In recent times, however, closed Western style houses with walls and corrugated iron roofs have become more and more common. In comparison to Western Europe or North America, the average number of children per family is relatively high: in 2006, a Samoan woman gave birth to 4.2 children on average during her life (Samoa Bureau of Statistics [SBS], 2012b).

Thus, children in Samoa grow up with many brothers and sisters and other peers around them (cf. Kroeber-Wolf, 1998, pp. 248-250). As a result of more than fifty years of mass migration to overseas, Samoan social structure has become more complex, since the Samoan *‘āiga* now extends far beyond the traditional village setting. Nowadays, it is very common that Samoans

receive remittances from their relatives living overseas. This money constitutes a significant source of income for many families in Samoa (Gough, 2006, p. 91).

### 5.3 Childhood in Samoa

Children in Samoa are growing up in the middle of their *'āiga* , i.e. the greater family including uncles, aunts, cousins etc. Samoan children can use the word *tinā* (mother) for all female relatives in the mother's generation and the word *tamā* for all male relatives in the father's generation. Moreover, Samoan language does not differentiate between siblings and cousins of the same sex, since all are referred to as *uso*. It is relatively common that some children do not sleep in the same house with their biological parents but in the house of someone else who belongs to the *'āiga*. Mageo even tells us that in pre-Christian times, children often grew up in households other than those of their biological parents when another *tama* or *tina* of the extended family wanted a particular child or because of the child's own preferences (2010, p. 129). This suggests that the central unit of the Samoan social structure in which a child is raised is the extended family rather than the nuclear family. These and other factors like the relatively high number of children per family create a populated environment and Samoan children learn to interact with several members of the greater family early on in life (Ochs, 1988). Apart from their extended family, Samoan children are part of the village community (*nu'u*) and engage in communal activities as well as play with peers belonging to other *'āiga.*

The structure of Samoan villages and the traditional open-built architecture enhance social interaction and make privacy almost impossible. In a sense, one could speak of an architectural transparency in Samoa which is interesting given the fact that Samoa was also mentioned in the context of the debate on the opacity of other minds. In Samoa, individuals are under constant scrutiny. With respect to children, we can conclude that both infants and children are almost always under the observation of someone (Kroeber-Wolf, 1998, p. 250).

The large number of children in Samoa and their early involvement in extended family networks as well as wider village communities does not mean that they are attributed a central position in social life, however. As a matter of fact, children are not given any high degree of attention. On the contrary, children in Samoa have "a status ranking only just above that of the family dogs" (Shore, 1982, p. 188), or, more neutrally put, their position in the Samoan social hiearchy is "at the bottom of the ladder" (Va'a, 2006, p. 121). The core Samoan values of respect (*fa'aaloalo*) for socially higher ranking persons as well as obedience and service (*tautua*) to the community are taught to children from very early on (Kroeber-Wolf, 1998).

Kroeber-Wolf (1998, pp. 252-258) distinguishes between different main stages in the socialization of Samoan children. In the first months of life, infants are the focus of attention and have strong ties to their biological mother. Babies are warmheartingly accepted by the entire *'āiga* and this period is characterised by the demonstration of strong affection (ibid., p. 253). Early care is sensitive (cf. Mageo, 2011, p. 74). From very early on, parenthood is distributed among the other members of the *'āiga* and children learn to accept that these others might soothe and help them as well. This period is followed by a dramatic shift (Kroeber-Wolf, 1998, p. 253) regarding the attention and affection offered to the child. From 18 months of age onwards, children are distanced by those caregivers of higher rank. They are left alone more often and often not comforted when they cry. Instead, they receive harsh commands to stop crying (*Aua le pisa!*) and are made to perform small tasks and duties. In Samoa, care is delegated from higher-ranking members of the *'āiga* to lower-ranking ones. Adult caregivers might tell an older sister to take care of the young one. But as soon as there is another sibling available, the older sister will tell her brother or sister to take care of the young one. Samoan children thus grow up in a group of siblings and the resonsibility is given to children that themselves often are not older than five or six years. At about the age of ten, children work almost as much as adults do. They have to deliver messages, buy small things in a village's shop, help in the family plantation, clean up, fetch water, and look after younger ones.

Summing up, we can say that childhood in Samoa is characterised by a high degree of social interaction with peers and all other age groups from early on. Children learn to attach to various members of the extended family and are cared for by older siblings as soon as the biological caregiver's primary care is no longer necessary and children are able to attend others' orders and instructions. Moreover, Samoan children have various obligations and duties towards family members from early on in their lives.

### 5.4 Samoan folk psychology

In this subchapter, I will introduce and describe different concepts that are important to Samoan thought and for the purpose of this work. After saying something about the concept of person, I will talk about the role of individual intentions before Samoan concepts of inner experience and behaviour are introduced. The *loto* is where Samoans localize individual will. Two different kinds of behaviour are described by the Samoan terms *āmio* and *aga*. Finally, I will talk about Samoans' relational orientation and the concept of *alofa*.

### *5.4.1 The concept of person*

Bradd Shore conjectured that there is perhaps "no more powerful barrier to our accurate perception of Samoan culture than a complex set of assumptions that most Westerners (and perhaps especially contemporary Americans) hold about the nature of the person" (1982, p. 133). This set of assumptions has famously been described by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz:

> The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against other social and natural background is, however incorrigible it might seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures. (1975, p. 48)

A detailed depiction of the Samoan conception of person is therefore an important part when trying to provide an account of Samoan folk psychology.
Ochs (1982) observed that Samoan children do not try to get out of trouble by saying "I did not do it on purpose" as in Western cultures. Instead, they deny having done the deed at all. One explanation for such behaviour is given by Ochs (1982):

> From a Samoan perspective, people have little control over their actions. Persons are not conceptualized as integrated beings; they do not have a central control mechanism that organizes and directs human actions and states. Bodily actions and functions are associated with particular body parts and not with a focal governing source. (ibid., p. 89)

The lack of a "focal governing source" seems to be echoed in Samoan language. Samoan, in contrast to English, is an example of an "anti-person-oriented language" (Mosel, 1991). Samoans often use expressions where the perceiving subject is not mentioned: *ua lavea le lima* (literally: the hand was cut) instead of "I cut myself," *mamafa le isu* (lit.: the nose is heavy) instead of "I have a cold." This omission of the perceiving subject is extended to third person expressions as well: *Leaga le ulu* (lit.: the head is bad) instead of "he/she is crazy," *vave le lima* (lit.: the hand is fast) instead of "he/she is a thief", etc. As these examples show, "Samoan language does not have a reflexive pronoun and there are no such expressions as 'I hurt myself' or 'he cut himself'" (Duranti, 1985, p. 48). Ochs (1982) supports Duranti's linguistic observations: "All of these linguistic facts suggest a concept of person that is

fragmented and not strongly in control of actions and states" (ibid., p. 90). Such a fragmented concept of person is also supported by Shore's observations, as the following two quotations demonstrate:

> When speaking of themselves or others, Samoans often characterize people in terms of specific "sides" (itū) or "parts" (pito) or particular "characteristics" ('uiga). No attempt is made to provide a summary characterization of a whole integrated person. (1982, p. 137)

> Samoans commonly talk about actions and feelings as if the body were a decentralized agglomeration of discrete parts, each imbued with its own will. Thus, such constructions as "my thoughts are angry," "my feelings are happy," "my eyes cried," "his feelings are pained," "the desire to sleep/eat/go has come," "his hand touched (i.e., stole) the money," and "the sadness has sprung up" are all common ways of relating an actor to actions or feelings. (ibid., p. 173)

According to Shore, there are no terms in Samoan like the English "personality", "self" or "character" (ibid., p. 136). Mosel (1991) acknowledges that linguistic differences correspond to cultural differences. She mentions several examples demonstrating that it is possible in Samoan language to make statements about actions without mentioning the agent at all and says that in Samoan "there is a clear tendency to avoid expressions which foreground the person" (ibid., p. 299). However, she says that it might be very difficult, if not impossible, to say "whether or not a certain way of expression says anything about a person's way of thinking" (ibid., p. 302).

### *5.4.2 Intentions*

Alessandro Duranti did his research in the village of Falefa on Upolu. Duranti was mainly interested in linguistic anthropology and, more specifically, in the role of intentions in interpreting speech. He criticized speech act theorists who assumed that meaning is already fully defined in a speaker's mind before the act of speaking (cf. 1988, p. 14) by providing examples from his study of the Samoan *fono*. A *fono* is a particularly important social event in Samoa where important, high-ranking people meet. Duranti's examples are from a special convocation where Samoan title holders – chiefs (*matai*) and oratores (*tulāfale*) – meet to function both as a high court for matai crimes and as a legislative body for village affairs (cf. Duranti, 1988, p. 16). His observations led him to the following conclusion: "Rather than

taking words as representations of privately owned meanings, Samoans practice interpretation as a way of publically controlling social relationships rather than as a way of figuring out what a given person 'meant to say'" (1988, p. 15). In a social context like the *fono*, the individual intentions of a speaker are of minor importance, as "it is not the individual actor but his dramatis persona that is to be considered as the reference point" (Duranti, 1988, p. 15). In other words, Samoans seem to focus on someone's social role rather than on his individual intentions. As a consequence, it is the words themselves that have to be judged and interpreted:

> Samoans often seem to ignore the speaker's alleged intentions and concentrate instead on the consequences of someone's words. Rather than going back to speculate on what someone 'meant to say' … participants in the speech event rely on the dynamics between the speaker's words and the ensuing circumstances (audience's response included) to assign interpretation. (Duranti, 1986, p. 240)

A speaker in a Samoan fono has no privileged position with respect to the meaning of his words. Interpretation, consequently, "is based on the ability (and power) that others may have to invoke certain conventions, to establish links between different acts and different social personae" (ibid., p. 241). Meaning is jointly negotiated, or, in other words, it is "seen as the product of an interaction (words included) and not necessarily as something that is contained in someone's mind" (Duranti, 1988, p. 27).

In Samoa, it is usually the orator who speaks on behalf of a matai. Orators can gain prestige as well as material gratification for doing so, but they can also get in trouble and get blamed if something in an interaction or transaction goes wrong (cf. Duranti, 1988). For example, "an orator can be held responsible for having announced something on behalf of a higher ranking matai. Retaliation may take place against him if people cannot have direct access to the original 'addressor' of the message" (ibid., p. 16).

The following example is taken from Duranti (1988). An orator called Loa is accused for announcing the coming of the district's Member of Parliament (M.P.). Chiefs and other important people from seven subvillages gathered together and waited, but the M.P. did not come. Since the orator Loa announced the M.P. and because he is also related to him, Loa is accused and Iuli, one of the two highest ranking orators, suggests to heavily fine Loa. Duranti comments:

> No one challenges Iuli's accusations by introducing the issue of Loa's motivations or his possible intentions. The consequences of the orator's words are instead discussed, more specifically, the fact that his words are seen as having caused the inconvenience of important people and contributed to their public loss of face. (1988, pp. 19-20)

Nobody stands up for Loa and refers to his good intentions because "Samoans do not evoke 'good will'" (Duranti, 1988, p. 16). In another example, the orator Fa'aonu'u favours the decision of chief Savea to go to court to confront the M.P. with whom he had a dispute. Savea, however, later changes his mind under pressure from important council members. Consequently, Fa'aonu'u is reprimanded by the higher-ranking senior orator for having said something that was contradicted by the chief Savea - although at a later point. This suggests that the practice of having orators speak on behalf of a chief provides a possibility for the chief "to change his opinion without loss of face" (ibid., p. 22).

Duranti's study of the Samoan *fono* led him to conclude that individual intentions are of minor importance in interpreting speech. This does, however, not necessarily imply that Samoans generally stick to a doctrine of the opacity of other minds. Duranti observed that orators often speak in the first person plural form, since they speak on behalf of a matai and his extended family (*'āiga*) or even on behalf of a subvillage, village or a whole district. In his study, however, Duranti said that "the two highest ranking orators, Moe'ono and Iuli, usually speak in the first person singular: They are clearly the leading forces of the local polity and people are concerned with what *each of them* thinks" (1988, p. 25).

Apparently, high-ranking people can afford to have their own mind. Their individual intentions and thoughts are of interest and they have the authority over the meaning of whatever they have in mind. Whether intentions are considered or not in Samoa is therefore something that seems to depend on rank.

### *5.4.3 The "loto"*

Against the background of a "decentralized" or "fragmented" concept of person and Samoans de-emphasis of individual intentions, it might come to a surprise that Samoans clearly localize the personal side of the self in the *loto*. Mageo dramatically states: "The unknowable *loto* is a pool of darkness that one cannot fathom" (2011, p. 76). According to Milner's (1993) *Samoan Dictionary*, the word loto basically has three meanings. First, loto can refer to a "pool, stretch of deep (or deeper) water" (ibid., p. 112). Second, it means "heart, feeling (as opposed to mind and soul)" (ibid.). Third, it can refer to the will (ibid.).

In line with this, Mageo (1998) says that the word loto "is derived from the word loloto. Loloto is the word used for depths in general and in particular for the depths of the sea; a loto is a small deep, such as one finds in a river, a lagoon, or a person" (ibid., p. 64) Moreover, the term loto "denotes the subjective dimension of experience" (ibid., p. 139) and does particularly refer to individual will (ibid., p. 145). Mageo argues that loto, used as a verb, can be translated differently as "to will", "to feel", or "to think" (Mageo, 2010, pp. 123-124). The term thus "conflates what we consider subjectivity's distinctive activities: willing, thinking, feeling, and desiring" (ibid., p. 124). Although the term can be translated differently, Mageo repeatedly argues that personal willfulness is one of its most important semantic shadings:

> Willing is the most salient activity of the loto. When one adds fai to loto – literally "to do loto" – one does not get "to think," "to feel," "to desire," or "to remember," but "willful," a word that implies judgment and hence a moral problem. (ibid., p. 124)

Other Samoan terms partly overlap with the concept of loto. M*āfaufau*, used as a verb, can be translated as "consider, reflect" or "think out, devise" (Milner, 1993, p. 119). As a noun, it can be translated either as "mind", "brain", or "memory" (ibid.). Another closely related term is *manatu*, which is mainly translated as "to think" (ibid., p. 128). Nevertheless, the term loto seems to be the more important concept. This is reflected in the fact that a huge variety of Samoan mental state terms (mainly emotion terms) are built around the word loto. Some examples from Gerber's work (1985) on Samoan emotion terms are *lotofuatiaifo* (voluntary choice), *lotomaualalo* (humility), *lotomamā* (absence of angry thoughts), *lototele* (brave), *lotomaualuga* (arrogant), *lotoleaga* (jealousy), *fa'alotolotolua* (indecision) and so forth (ibid., p. 140). In her research on Samoan emotion terms, Gerber (1985) adds another important piece of information:

> The kind of thoughts most closely associated with the loto are thoughts that arise spontaneously. A person may, for example, suddenly think of going to visit a friend: the desire, the thought, and the plan of action are all believed to arise in the loto. (ibid., p. 136)

Interestingly, while mental states such as spontaneously arising desires, thoughts, and plans of action are considered to cause and guide behaviour in the ToM-framework, Samoans often consider behaviour driven by these states as either childish or inappropriate. A mature

Samoan should precisely not act on the basis of his spontaneously arising desires and thoughts, but on the basis of his social role. This leads us to Samoan concepts of behaviour.

### *5.4.4 "Āmio" and "aga"*

Whereas *loto* denotes the origin of personal impulses, *āmio* denotes the behaviour that stems from it and represents "the socially unconditioned aspects of behavior that point away from social norms, toward personal drives or desires as the conditioning factors" (Shore, 1982, p. 154), it denotes behaviour originating in a person's own will (Mageo, 1998, p. 145) and "is best understood as a derivative of that part of the self which Samoans call the *loto* and which we call subjectivity" (Mageo, 1989, p. 181). Another term, *aga*, refers both to the essential nature of persons and things and to "characteristic social behavior and to the roles one plays" (Mageo, 2002, p. 341). It is "prescriptive, suggesting categories of abstract behavioral styles appropriate to certain socially defined statuses" (Shore, 1982, p. 154). A very illuminating explanation was given by one of Shore's informants:

> The word *āmio* means the things you do that originate from yourself. It's your own choice; your *āmio* is your option. But the word *aga*, that's the view of the other people as they observe you (*faitauina 'oe*). That's the considered judgment (*maitau mai*) of others about you.... Whereas you can say to yourself "my *āmio*," you can never say "my *aga*" referring to yourself. That's an expression used by others when they judge you. (cited in Shore, 1982, p. 154)

The Samoan word for "bad" is *leaga*, which literally means "no or without *aga*" (Shore, 1977, cited in Ochs, 1982). Good behaviour is consequently behaviour that others consider as appropriate. Since children act without *aga*, it is not surprising that Samoans think of children as being "naughty, willful, easily angered, and cheeky, that is, generally hard to control" (Ochs, 1988, p. 159). Therefore, "social control is understood by Samoans as public constraint over private impulses or, in other words, as the imposition of aga over āmio" (Shore, 1982, p. 186). If Samoans meet or see someone on the road, the first question is not "How are you doing?", like in many Western cultures. The common question is *"O fea e te alu ai?"* (Where are you going?). Throop (2008) tells us that people on Yap have to think of an appropriate response to the same question in the light of possible moral evaluations from the side of the questioners. Duranti's interpretation of the question in Samoa is quite similar:

> To ask “Where are you going?” is a request for an account, which may include the reasons for being away from one’s home, on someone else’s territory, or on a potentially dangerous path. To answer such a greeting may imply that one commits oneself not only to the truthfulness of one’s assertion but also to the appropriateness of one’s actions. It is not by accident, then, that in some cases speakers might try to be as evasive as possible. (Duranti, 1997, p. 84)

Learning to act with aga does presuppose to consider the other’s judgment about oneself in one’s own behaviour. Behaving appropriately, then, becomes only possible by a continuous reflection of what others might possibly think of oneself. A precondition for such a continuous reflecting, however, is that one must care about what others think.

#### *5.4.5 Relational orientation and “alofa”*

For Samoans, relationships and the mutual dependency must be of great importance for an “imposition of aga over āmio” (Shore, 1982, p. 186) to occur. Such a relational orientation is part of Shore’s account of Samoa:

> A clue to the Samoan notion of person is found in the popular Samoan saying teu le vā (take care of the relationship). Contrasted with the Greek dicta “Know thyself” or “To thine own self be true”, this saying suggests something of the differences between Occidental and Samoan orientations. Lacking any epistemological bias that would lead them to focus on “things in themselves” or the essential quality of experience, Samoans instead focus on things in their relationships, and the contextual grounding of experience. (1982, p. 136)

Social relationships in Samoa are generally known as *vā*. Mageo (2011) argues that socially oriented cultures consider the group as the main social actor, whereas Western cultures focus more on the individual.[22] In traditional Samoan society, a single person acted as the

[22] Although Mageo argues for a multidimensional model of the self (Mageo, 2002) and speaks of the “infamous division of cultures into egocentric and sociocentric” (2002, p. 339), she still makes heuristic use of such binary distinctions as “more individually oriented places” and “more socially oriented locales” (2011, p. 76). This distinction is a commonly used one in the field of cross-cultural psychology and yielded a variety of studies which relate different measures to it. Hofstede (1991) distinguishes between individualism and collectivism, Markus and Kitayama (1991) between independent and interdependent self-construals, and Keller (2007) between a focus on autonomy vs. relatedness in caregivers’ socialization practices. According to Kagitçibasi, “there is evidence supporting the view that these concepts do not necessarily form opposite poles and may coexist in individuals or groups in different situations or with different target groups” (1994, p. 56).

representative of the whole group. An impressive example is *ifoga*, a ceremonial request for forgiveness:

> It was not the individual who redressed crimes, but his or her chief in a ceremony of apology to the offended family. The chief and his retinue would sit in the sun before the offended family, bearing with them baskets of stones and wood. Stone and wood, the materials for an earth oven, symbolized that if the offended family chose not to forgive, they could cook and eat the supplicants. This offer was not literal, of course, but symbolized abject regret. (Mageo, 2011, p. 72)

An individual who commited a crime was thus protected by his group. To take care of one's relationships (*teu le vā*) means to engage in corresponding acts. This brings us to another important concept of Samoan thought, namely, the concept of *alofa*, which is commonly translated as "love" (Milner, 1993). *Alofa* is another example of LCCP and clearly related to what Anutans call *aropa* (Feinberg, 2011), conceptually as well as in terms of etymology. Gerber says: "This is a major way in which Samoan values about mutual help and giving are expressed. The idea of giving is the concept most commonly associated with the feeling" (1985, p. 145). According to Gerber, Samoans invoke typcial scenarios to illustrate cases of alofa, and he concludes that "the feeling of alofa approaches the sense of compassion, empathy, or pity" (ibid.), with giving and helping being the most important behavioural correlates.

A fragmented concept of person on the one hand and the development of a largely relational identity that stresses the social role rather than personal will and values *alofa* on the other, must have its origin in very specific experiences Samoans make, experiences that are transmitted from one generation to the next via specific socialization practices. If it were not only Samoan language that does not foreground the individual person, but Samoan culture in general, then one would expect Samoan socialization practices to teach children exactly what is reflected in language: not to foreground individual persons and to impose *aga* over *āmio*.

To sum up this chapter, no better words could be found than the following remarks by Shore:

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Nevertheless, I will use these distinctions in the remainder of this work and locate Samoans on the more interdependent, socially oriented side where people focus on relatedness. Against the background of the anthropological reports on Samoa in this chapter, I think that this is justified. However, this is not to say that more individually centered motives and orientations do not exist in Samoans.

> To assert as I have that Samoans do not clearly formulate a conception of personality or focus on "the self" is not to say that no personal feelings and inner demands exist for Samoans. On the contrary…Samoans have a very lively conception of private experience, but it is a conception of forces that are understood as an ineradicable residue of destructive energy, or will, against which social life is set. Samoans live most of their lives in a very public arena. The more private aspects of experience are strongly discouraged by the absence of walls in a Samoan house, and by powerful norms of social life, which keep people in almost constant social interaction. (1982, p. 148)

### 5.5 Learning how to be Samoan: Socialization practices

*"For she was simply fed up with the layers people clothed themselves in. The layers of clothes. But more particularly the façades people wore on their faces and how they passed on such façades to their children. For that is how she was raised."*

Sia Figiel, *They who do not grieve*

According to Elinor Ochs (1988), mental states of others are not a suitable object for speculation in Samoa (cf. Schieffelin, 2008). Ochs – like Duranti - did her fieldwork in the village of Falefa on the island of Upolu and was mainly interested in language socialization. She observed that Samoan children do not only grow up in a highly stratified environment, but that child care, too, is organized by rank (cf. Ochs, 1988). This results in interactions between children and caregivers that are "strikingly different from those described in Western societies" (Ochs, 1982, p. 86). Ochs was especially interested in linguistic interactions that differed from those prevalent between mothers and children in western-middle class societies. She observed that Samoan caregivers do not engage with their children in verbal exchanges which are typical in Western cultures, where caregivers expand what their children say and try to interpret vocalizations as well as gaze or gestures and to mirror these interpretations to the child. Ochs detected differences in the use of expansions and clarifications as well as explicit guessing and speculation. In Samoa, Ochs observed an absence of expansions (1982, p.87). Caregivers in middle-class Western societies typically expand utterances of a child. In doing so, a caregiver is:

1) assuming or acting as if the child has performed an *intentional*, social act, i.e., as if the child directs his action towards a social goal;
2) providing an interpretation of an *unclear* intention (i.e., making an hypothesis); and
3) adopting, in part, the perspective of the child (*decentering*), so that the intent may be assessed; in so doing, the caregiver adjusts to the *child's egocentrism*.

(Ochs, 1982, p. 88)

According to Ochs, expansions are themselves an "act of interpretation" (1982, p. 92), as infants' unclear utterances are treated *as if* they conveyed meaning, *as if* there was an intention behind every expression of the infant. In so doing, the caregiver "is demonstrating that intentions are important" (ibid., p. 99). In using expansions, mothers treat the infant "as a social being and as an addressee" (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1994, p. 480) and mothers take the perspective of their child in order to interpret what the child *meant* to say. In doing so, a certain aspect of Western folk psychology is transmitted: "In terms of transmission of culture, the caregiver is demonstrating that intentions are important" (Ochs, 1982, p. 99). Ochs believes that such behaviour is culturally constructed and that this interest in intention is not matched in Samoa. Expansions are very much comparable to explicit guesses. Expressed guesses of caregivers give "the child a role in the assignment of meaning; the child is given veto power, so to speak, over the caregiver's understanding. In the expressed guess, then, meaning is negotiated before it is assigned" (Ochs, 1988, p. 136). The child can confirm or reject the guess of the caregiver. In Samoa, one finds a "reluctance to make guesses" (Ochs, 1982, p. 94). Since caregiving in Samoa is socially stratified (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1994; Ochs, 1988), "high status persons tend not to evidence an awareness of interest in the activities of lower status persons immediately around them" (Ochs, 1982, pp. 81-82). This cultural rule also characterizes adult-child interactions in Samoa. Therefore, Samoans think that "the burden of intelligibility rests with the child (as lower status party) rather than with more mature members of the society" (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1994, p. 497). Whereas mothers in Western middle-class societies are considered to be good mothers when they "assist the child in clarifying and expressing ideas" (ibid., p. 492) by decentering *themselves*, good mothering in Samoa is almost the reverse:

> A young child is encouraged to develop an ability to take the perspective of higher ranking persons in order to assist them and facilitate their well-being. The ability to do so is part of

> showing *fa'aaloalo* (respect), a most necessary demeanor in social life. (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1994, p. 492)

In Samoa, it is not the mother, but the child that has to decenter in order to attend to and serve higher-ranking persons. This explains caregivers' reluctance to guess what a child meant to say. Expanding, guessing and ascertaining the meaning of an utterance are procedures for clarification, and "the burden of clarification" (ibid., p. 491) tends to rest with lower-ranking hearers in Samoa. Corresponding lessons are already taught to children when their utterances are not expanded. Moreover, learning to decenter in Samoa is also accomplished through the process of elicited imitation, which "in at least one way is the reverse process of caregiver expansion" (Ochs, 1982, p. 99). Ochs explains the difference between the two as follows:

> In expanding, the caregiver attempts to repeat what the child has expressed. In elicited imitation, the child attempts to repeat what the caregiver has expressed. In expansions, the caregiver engages in some degree of decentering. In imitations, the child engages in limited decentering. We find in traditional Samoan society, a heavy reliance on the latter and minimization of the former. (1982, p. 99)

Caregivers in Samoa want their children to repeat utterances and exercise this with children from very young age. Samoan children soon become apt at delivering messages from one household to the other, and children "at the age of 3 are expected to deliver *verbatim* messages on behalf of more mature members of the family" (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1994, p. 491).

Ochs draws an important distinction between paths to knowledge and limits of knowledge and concludes with respect to Samoa: "As paths for knowledge, traditional Samoan speakers prefer to elicit repetitions of utterances rather than to explicitly guess at the intended meaning of utterances….As for limits of knowledge, generally Samoans disprefer guessing at the unclear thoughts of others" (1988, p. 144).

In line with the above said, Samoan caregivers do generally not simplify their speech in addressing small children. Neither do they break down propositions into rhetorical questions and answers, nor do they express propositions with children through test questions or answers and sentence completions. Furthermore, they do not engage in labelling routines with small children because Samoan caregivers "do not ask children questions to which they know the answers" (Duranti & Ochs, 1986, p. 226). In contrast, such practices are very common among

caregivers in Europe and North America. These differing practices must be seen against the background of socialization goals in Samoa. According to Ochs (1982), one of the major socialization messages to the child is not to draw attention to himself or herself and not to talk about the ego. Instead, the focus lies on properties and actions of others. However, since caregivers do not guess what a child might intend because children are hierarchically lower-ranking, one might suspect that mental states are not *per se* an unsuitable object for guessing and clarification. Although mental states of others are generally not a favoured object of speculation and although explicit guessing focuses on the "nature of some external event or state of affairs rather than some internal psychological event or state" (ibid., p. 140), mindguessing still occurs, especially when it might help to follow the order of a higher-ranking person:

> when a higher-ranking person orders a lower-ranking person to carry out some action, the personal intentions of the speaker are also of primary importance. The lower-ranking party cannot assign his own interpretation but rather must grasp that intended by the higher-ranking speaker. (Ochs, 1988, p. 142)

Therefore, lower-ranking persons may clarify by guessing when a higher-ranking person directs them to do something. In such a case, "the explicit guess is part of serving the higher-ranking party" (ibid., p. 139).

At this point, we are able to better contextualize one of the opacity claims mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. Ochs said that "Samoans generally display a strong dispreference for guessing at what is going on in another person's mind" (1988, p. 143).[23] I have described how this dispreference is transmitted via socialization – however, it became also evident that such a dispreference is especially salient when a higher-ranking person should guess what is in a lower-ranking person's mind and that people might engage in mindguessing when it comes to grasping what a higher-ranking person has in mind. Ochs does therefore not endorse a strong opacity reading.

Jeannette Mageo highlights another aspect of Samoan socialization practices. She lived in Samoa for several years and was interested in a variety of research questions, among them

[23] In line with this is the behaviour of Samoan children when they have done something wrong. As mentioned before, children might try to avoid punishment by "denying that they did that culpable act, but they do not try to worm out of it by saying, 'I didn't mean it', 'It was just an accident', 'I did it by mistake', 'I didn't do it on purpose'", etc. (Ochs, 1988, pp. 141-142). I haved used this example when I was talking about the Samoan concept of person and the belief that people have little control over their actions, but the example also illustrates that caregivers might not be willing to excuse children's misdeeds by considering what they intended to do.

self-psychology, socialization practices, gender issues and dream interpretation. According to Mageo (1998), one important aspect of Samoan socialization practices is to teach children to hide their inner feelings and desires and to restrain their expression. This is tantamount to teaching children to be strong and brave (*lototele*). Comparing Samoa with US culture, Mageo says:

> In Samoa, by way of contrast, one never shows or shares personal feelings. Even upon the death or departure of a loved one, a person of character expresses only appropriate sentiments – they do not cry or carry on: they are *lototele*. Neither does one console when others display personal feelings. (2011, p. 85)

Different practices like shaming and teasing serve the function to cloak this personal side of the self. Mageo argues from a psychoanalytic point of view. The child's desire for individual attention is labelled with negatively connotated *fia*-terms. The Samoan word *fia* designates desire and can be translated with the English verb *to want*. There are a number of terms that negatively label children's desire for individual attention, for example *fiapoto* (want to be smart), *fiasili* (want to be the best), and *fiafa´alialia/fiasiō* (want to make a show, to show off). Considering these terms, what children desire is not simply attention, it is the desire to be perceived as being different, unique, or better than others. This desire is not only negatively labelled, it is also transformed into something undesirable through the practice of teasing, since teasing "gives the child attention in an unpalatable form" (Mageo, 1998, p. 63). In this way, the desire for individual attention is also linked with a negative emotional experience. As a consequence, children learn that individual attention can be painful. A special kind of this practice is called *faipona*, which is "directed either at personal shortcomings and deformities or at the private side of experience" (ibid., p. 64). Although teasing in Samoa is generally a playful style of relating with children, it is more than that. Teasing focuses on personal things and the private aspects of the self. The observed Samoan "tendency to cloak the personal side of the self is also the effect of teasing" (ibid., p. 67). Being teased, therefore, results in specific feelings like *matamuli* (lit. eyes behind, shy) and *mā* (embarassed) (ibid., p. 98). These feelings might be the first felt contact with what others have called opacity doctrine (Robbins & Rumsey, 2008), and teasing might precisely be an early lesson that implicitly teaches this doctrine:

> The child who is mā resolutely conceals inner thoughts and feelings. This habit of hiding an aspect of the self from others leads to hiding it from oneself: Samoans are generally

> indefinite about their own interior life and forswear the possibility of fathoming anyone else's. (Mageo, 1998, p. 64)

Being indefinite about one's own inner life and forswearing the possibility of fathoming anyone else's are not two different results of Samoan socialization – they belong together in Mageo's view: "What one cannot fathom in oneself cannot be shared with another" (1998, p. 64). Forswearing the possibility of fathoming anyone else's inner life is tantamount to expressing opacity claims. Mageo does therefore not only confirm the existence of opacity claims in Samoa, she also provides an explanatory account of how these claims might arise as a consequence of specific experiences and she offers a detailed description of how caregivers impose *aga* over *āmio*, to use Shore's terminology again (1982, p. 186).
Derek Freeman, the famous anthropologist who challenged Margaret Mead's account of adolescent sexuality in Samoa, arrived at a conclusion that fits quite well to Mageo's account:

> The child learns early to comply overtly with parental and chiefly dictates while concealing its true feelings and intentions. As a result, Samoans, whatever may be their real feelings about a social situation, soon become adept at assuming an outward demeanor pleasing to those in authority (…) it is usual, especially in demanding social situations, for Samoans to display an affable demeanor which is, in reality, a defensive cover for their true feelings. (1983, pp. 216-217)

If Samoans assume an "outward demeanor pleasing to those in authority", they engage in a concealing strategy which makes it difficult for others to realize the true feelings and thoughts of someone. This is also confirmed by Mageo (1989): "As with private thoughts, however, one controls and conceals personal feelings in order to play the appropriate social part" (ibid., p. 192). Since Samoans appear to assume an outward demeanor which conceals personal feelings, they can also be said to publicly present an "opaque exterior" (Throop, 2008, p. 415).
But why is it so important that Samoan children learn to cloak the personal side of the self?
Samoans "tend to regard the loto as morally suspect" (Mageo, 1998, p. 145). Bradd Shore concluded on the basis of interviews with approximately 50 informants that in the Samoan conception, "human nature appears to be selfish, impulsive, and destructive" (Gerber, 1982, p. 158). This aspect of human nature, residing in the loto, is most active in children who have not yet learned to suppress it. The loto "impels children to be cheeky, challenging the status of

elders” (Mageo, 1998, p. 86). Children who challenge the status of elders are supposed to learn where their position is, and so “the most common reproach made to children is that they are *tautalaitiiti*, which literally means “to talk above one’s age” and refers to cheeky behavior through which a person presumes to be above his or her station” (Mageo, 1998, p. 72).
The loss of the caregiver’s exclusive attention towards oneself and its replacement by forms of negative attention (teasing, shaming) should, from a psychoanalytic point of view, result in feelings of anger. Samoan socialization practices teach children to take their appropriate position in the social hierarchy. Consequently, “there is literally no socially acceptable way of directly expressing anger against one’s parents” (Gerber, 1985, p. 154). In Samoan language, several terms exist which indicate covert responses of anger to parental demands. Gerber mentions “*’augatā*, ‘laziness’, *’o ’ono*, ‘suppressed anger’, *fiu*, ‘fed up’, and *musu*, ‘reluctance’” (ibid.) and says that what these terms have in common is “not only semantic similarity but also the fact that they express resistance to parentally assigned work” (ibid.). The most common and broadly accepted term in this respect is the word *musu* which parents use to characterize their resistant children and which can be translated as “be utterly uncooperative, sullen and obdurate” or simply with “to refuse” (Milner, 1993).
Gerber gives a very lively description how *musu* might show up among a group of young people who:

> will talk together, play guitars and sing quietly, the girls may comb each other’s hair. When a call comes from the front room, all this pleasant interaction ceases; the look of annoyance can be plainly read on all faces. Typically, the girls will arise clumsily with an exaggerated show of exhaustion, and sometimes they will whisper “Alas.” Genuine anger may flash briefly as the servitors grimace and quietly mimic the words of the command. (Gerber, 1975, cited in Mageo, 2010, p. 126)

Since the direct expression of anger is not acceptable, Gerber comes to the following conclusion:

> To the extent they can, people will channel their anger into these mild, less disruptive feelings. To the extent they are successful, they may be unaware of how deep their anger is. It is likely, however, that they will continue to experience residues of socially unacceptable rage which they are unable to express, and of which they may not be aware. (1985, p. 154)

The consequences of the early experiences described in this subchapter can be far-reaching. Gerber explains that most Samoans say of themselves "that they are aware of no particular bodily feeling that accompanies emotions, yet it is apparent that they undergo many of the same physiological disturbances that have been investigated by psychologists" (1985, p. 128). Her informants "almost never mentioned proprioception of bodily sensation spontaneously", nor did they "tend to describe the subjective quality of affective experience" (ibid., p. 137). Gerber believes that "Samoans experience these physiological aspects of affective arousal on some level, but their explicit verbal emotion system does not define them as particularly relevant or memorable" (ibid., p. 128). Therefore, although they experience internal sensation associated with certain emotions, "they are generally unable to express it verbally" (ibid., p. 138). However, Gerber found some informants "who were particularly able to supply descriptions of proprioceptions" (ibid.). Otherwise, Gerber would probably not have been able to cluster Samoan emotion terms at all. The fact that many Samoans could not provide adequate descriptions of how certain specific emotions feel from the inside is, according to Gerber, due to "Samoans' concentration on the social pole of emotion" and therefore "a matter of relative attention" (ibid.). When her informants talked about emotions, they described them "in terms of the actions the feelings called forth, the stereotyped scenarios in which the feelings would be an appropriate response, and the specific relationships with close associates (e.g., parents, siblings, and friends) common to those scenarios" (ibid., p. 137). This suggests that Samoans orient "toward social or situational referents rather than internal sensations" (ibid., p. 135). This again, resonates with Shore's account. Gerber suggests that we might "think of body cues as available for notice, but generally ignored, while social and external cues have been highly elaborated" (ibid., p. 141). Mageo (2002), by contrast, cannot confirm this. Referring to her teaching experiences in the 1980s, she says that this focus on external aspects of emotion might have shifted more into the direction of its internal aspects (ibid., p. 347).

Nevertheless, the general picture we have arrived at depicts Samoan socialization practices as a repression of personal impulses and individualistic motives. Elinor Ochs (1988) also described control strategies of Samoan caregivers and mentions the use of bald imperatives and the arousal of affects like shame and fear. The latter two have the function to stop children from behaving in unwanted ways, with shame being elicited either by shaming practices or challenging children. Although this partially confirms the general picture, Ochs also mentions that caregivers invoke positive feelings to influence children's behaviour.

According to Ochs, caregivers "often try to evoke empathy or love in a small child, particularly when they want the child to behave in a certain way. These feelings are referred to generally by the term *alofa*" (1988, p. 149). In Ochs' view, Samoan children are not completely powerless. Somewhat surprisingly, she mentions caregivers' "willingness to let young children be sassy and assertive in family contexts (i.e. with no guests present)" (1988, pp. 157-158). For example, a caregiver "often giggles behind the palm of the hand when a two-year-old acts defiantly – swears, talks back, threatens, and so on" (ibid., p. 160) and caregivers "often say that their young charges are *ulavale* 'naughty' and *tautalaititi* 'cheeky' with grins on their faces" (ibid., p. 161). She says that within a family, "it is the incorrigible child, the troublemaker, who is often the darling and the favorite of the parents" (ibid.).

These observations contrast with the picture that evolved above, where socialization appeared purely authoritarian and repressive. Ochs' contribution is therefore an important corrective and she helps us to make sense of what Mageo describes when she says that caregivers "do indeed approve of boldness and assertiveness in small children. What Samoan children need to learn is the set of contexts in which this behavior is desirable and when it is not" (ibid.). Mageo's account of socialization in Samoa is therefore still valid, however, it does not provide the whole picture. Interestingly, the mere fact that Ochs tells us about the invocation of *alofa* in children in order to positively influence their behaviour can help us to see what has been said so far in a new light. Teasing and shaming are, from this point of view, not merely practices that are meant to inhibit impulses arising from the *loto*. Their aim is not simply to repress such impulses for the sake of repressing, but to pave the way for children to be able to show *alofa*, since *alofa* implies an active attitude of giving and helping others - and such prosocial behaviours are often rather at odds with the pursuit of personal motives and preferences. This brings us closer to an answer to the question why Samoans teach opacity doctrines – understood as described above – at all. Shore said that the "reluctance to discuss or pursue purely private experience is understandable in light of the largely relational identities that Samoans develop" (1982, p. 149). In this view, opacity claims become understandable in the light of Samoans' focus on relationships. Mageo points into the same direction: "In societies where most people experience themselves primarily as group members, subjectivity tends to be obscure. To the degree that people experience themselves primarily as individuals, connectedness to others becomes obscure" (2002, p. 342).

In Samoa, a focus on the group and on relatedness appears to be intimately tied to the enactment of *alofa*. That *alofa* might be as important as the repression of personal impulses and resulting anger was also noticed by Gerber. The focus in her work on Samoan emotions

was both on anger and *alofa*. She argues that “the available cultural expressions of anger do not permit Samoans to channel effectively all their hostile feelings, particularly when the objects of these feelings are social superiors” (1985, p. 122) and that the consideration of the conflict between anger on the one side and *alofa* (love) and *fa’aaloalo* (respect) on the other side might help to explain the contradictory accounts that sometimes depict Samoans as gentle, warm, unaggressive and full of respect (Mead, 2001) and sometimes as impulsive, aggressive and full of suppressed anger (Freeman, 1983).

At this point, some readers might wonder why a chapter on Samoan socialization practices does not (or only casually) include the work of the most famous Samoan anthropologists, namely, Margaret Mead and Derek Freeman. Mead’s study in 1928 and its extensive criticism by Derek Freeman in the early 1980s were followed by a academic and public debate that brought adolescence in Samoa as well as Samoan socialization practices to a worldwide public audience (Mead, 2001 [1928]; Freeman, 1983; cf. Kroeber-Wolf & Mesenhöller, 1998, pp. 16-20). Although Gerber (1985) values Freeman’s observation of the ambivalence between outward appearance and inner experience among Samoans, she criticizes him for giving “more weight to the feelings of anger than to the feelings of love and respect” (ibid., p. 156) which are, according to Gerber, at least as important for Samoans and which are also valued *individually* among Samoans. Freeman, in contrast, “gives little credence to the subjective reality of the generous, agreeable, and submissive ones” (Gerber, 1985, p. 157). I agree with Gerber’s conclusion: “Rejecting the importance of these feelings is a mistake equally as great as, and directly opposite to, Mead’s inability to see the potential for anger in the Samoan character” (ibid.).

The argument between Mead and Freeman and the critique of *both* accounts have a long history, much too long for the present work to delve into it. Both accounts, however, are considered by many anthropologists not to represent truthfully Samoan reality in its complexity and remain by and large merely of interest to the history of anthropology. However, I think that Freeman’s description of the negative feelings existent in Samoa is, although exaggerated, at least supporting Mageo’s more careful and subtle descriptions.

At this point, it is not clear whether what has been described so far leads to a real desinterest in others’ mental states, or, on the contrary, to a heightened preoccupation with them, since we have seen in other places (e.g. among the Tzotzil Maya; Groark, 2008) that opaque exteriors might pique people’s curiosity to explore what is beyond the surface of others’ apparent behaviour. Moreover, shouldn’t we expect people to be especially occupied with others’ mental states in a place where it is an explicit goal of socialization practices to focus

on others, on social interactions and relationships? Wouldn't we expect such people to be especially skilled in 'mindreading'-practices and empathy? Yet why, then, do they assert the opacity of other minds?

Let me try to answer these questions. I argue that the questions just raised are just another example of how influential ToM and corresponding ideas about how we manage to interact with each other presently are. As long as we think that a heightened focus on others and relationships must necessarily go hand in hand with more 'mindreading' or empathic knowing, we will not be able to find a way out of this dilemma. The only solution would be to provide a theoretical account which allows to think of a hightened focus on others and relationships as independent from ideas associated with 'mindreading'. I think that Victoria McGeer's (2001, 2007) account is of much help here. It is an account that brings us much closer to what we can actually learn from case studies in cultures where the opacity of other minds is asserted. Victoria McGeer recently proposed a so-called "regulative conception of folk psychology" (2007). She argues that folk psychology is not simply about explaining and predicting behaviour – in her view, it is a normative practice:

> our folk-psychological competence consists in our aptitude for making ourselves understandable to one another, as much as on our aptitude for understanding one another. And we do this by making (self and other) regulative use of the norms that govern appropriate attributions of a range of psychological states. (2007, p. 148)

McGeer prefers to talk of "psycho-practical know-how" or "psycho-practical expertise" (2001, p. 110). Instead of heaving to know how behaviours interact with private mental states, interactions succeed if one knows how behaviours interact with social roles, norms of comportment and rules. Based on this knowledge, people adjust their own behaviour and interpret the behaviour of others. This of course also impacts how people predict and explain each others' behaviour. A constant reference to individual mental states becomes superfluous – instead, people refer to social roles and how one *should* behave according to the shared norms. The consequences of McGeer's view are radical since they question the importance of ToM and 'mindreading'-practices in our everyday life:

> much of the work of understanding one another in day-to-day interactions is not really done by us at all, explicitly or implicitly. The work is done already and carried by the

> world, embedded in the norms and routines that structure such interactions. (McGeer, 2001, p. 119)

I have described above how socialization in Samoa can be summarized as an "imposition of aga over āmio" (Shore, 1982, p. 186). This actually confirms McGeer's theoretical account, since "skilled psycho-practioners are not just able to read other people in accord with shared norms; they also work to make themselves readable in accord with those same norms" (McGeer, 2001, p. 118). And this is precisely what Samoans, according to the anthropological accounts presented above, do. They learn via socialization to repress impulses arising from the *loto* in order to behave in line with *aga*. At the same time, they learn that others behave in accordance with their social role rather than with their private desires and motivations.
Note, that all this is not about an "either-or", but a matter of emphasis. In applying McGeer to the Samoan case, I do not want to suggest that Samoans stick to norms while we Westerners are mindreading all the time. On the contrary, the Samoan case might help us to detect a blind-spot in our own theorizing, which is heavily influenced by ToM ideas and often neglects the role of shared norms. Sticking to shared norms and mindreading is something both we *and* Samoans do – however, each culture might emphasize different aspects. Yet such different emphases do not force a rethinking of theories of mind and empathy *per se* – they only force a rethinking of the explanatory power we ascribe to such theories. Having said this, let us now have a look at the status of 'mindreading' and empathy in Samoa.

### 5.6 'Mindreading' in Samoa

First of all, it is necessary to say that the Samoan concept of the *loto* and resultant behaviour (*āmio*), although disavowed, is a clear indicator that Samoans *do* know about the private aspects and individual drives of other persons. As a matter of fact, the *loto* is never "socialized away" completely. Repressed impulses do never completely disappear. On the contrary, a society will either have to cope with occasional outbursts or establish culturally legitimate forms of how these repressed aspects can be expressed (for more information see Mageo, 1998). In gossip, for example, people talk about absent persons in a manner not appropriate for conversations in public. According to Mageo (1998), to say that talk is gossip "is also to infer that it is motivated by personalistic animus, rather than proper moral concerns" (ibid., p. 72). So the awareness of such personalistic impulses that arise in the *loto* seems to persist. This becomes also obvious when considering the fact that Samoan's often accept children's reluctant behaviour (*musu*). When labelling children's resistance as *musu*,

Samoans are at the same time aware of the private inner motivations and feelings that lead to this kind of resistance. Gerber explains this as follows:

> the existence of the cultural definition of musu can assist Samoans in remaining unaware of their own conflicts, or at least in masking them. The term seems to function as much to conceal the nature of a particular inner experience as it serves to express it. (1985, p. 129)

The ongoing existence of personalistic impulses is also acknowledged and institutionally accepted by the Samoan figure of the double (*soa*). The double comes into play in situations of courtship. The Samoan term *fa'asoa* can be translated as "to mediate in love affairs" (Shore, 1982, p. 164). The double is allowed to speak about the personal sentiments on behalf of the absent lover. In doing so, "a double also personifies the personal side of the self, or *loto* – repressed or channeled in all former discourses – now virtually free" (Mageo, 1998, p. 107). The institutionalization of the double can be seen as an example of the Samoan acknowledgement that there *are* inner feelings, thoughts, motivations and desires. The double "embodies a *loto* throroughly trained to act in the service of sociocentric values" (ibid.) and thus mediates between individual will and sociocentric values.

Another important argument brought forward by Kevin Groark (2008) was already mentioned in the previous chapter. Groark (2008) argued that the establishment of social opacity on a societal level presupposes knowledge of others' inner states. The very fact that private mental states must be artfully concealed via the presentation of opaque exteriors and various manoeuvres designed to frustrate others' 'mindreading'-attempts is an acknowledgment that people know about the possibility to gain insight in others' mental life. While direct exchange about personal impulses and feelings is frustrated by opaque exteriors and strategies of active occlusion among the Tzotzil, imaginative speculations about what the other is really thinking and feeling become more important (Groark, 2008).

From all the anthropological studies that deal with the opacity of other minds phenomenon, the contribution of Alessandro Duranti (2008) in the Anthropological Quarterly issue on the opacity of other minds is probably the most straightforward and conceptually elaborate attempt to clarify whether opacity doctrines have an impact on mindreading. According to Duranti, "conscious and explicit reading of other minds is one of the possible routes to understanding a situation retrospectively and prospectively" (2008, p. 492). The reference to the theory of mind framework is obvious. Interestingly, mindreading is a conscious and explicit process for Duranti. Although some scholars support the view that something like

implicit mindreading exists, Duranti focuses on the explicit and more conscious forms that would certainly best be captured experimentally by tasks of the *explicit verbal prediction* type (see chapter 2). Although he thinks that "communities (and individuals) vary in the extent to which reading other minds is recognized, verbalized, and justified" (ibid., p. 492), Duranti thinks that "some kind of mind reading obviously goes on in Samoa, like in any other place in the Pacific or elsewhere" (ibid., p. 490). He suggests to examine spontaneous interactions in everyday life as a way to investigate local forms of mindreading and provides two examples from his own field work experience in Samoa. The first focuses on a situation in which a speaker makes a prediction about what someone else will do, the second on a situation in which someone interprets what another person wants. Both types of verbal activities, according to Duranti, "are candidates for evidence of mind reading" (2008, p. 487).
In the first example, some women are sitting together and see the child of another woman who is absent. They suspect that the child's mother might come and get on their nerves with her stories. Duranti rejects this example – I think rightly - as "a type of inference that is based on repeated, generalizable, and even routinized behavior" (2008, p. 489). The prediction that this child's mother will come to get on their nerves might be nothing more than an expectation grounded in previous observations. Still, it is another example that is in line with the idea that we often predict other people's behaviour by other means than mental state inference, for example by generalizing on the basis of previous behaviour (cf. Andrews, 2008). In Duranti's (2008) words:

> Everywhere in the world people are constantly trying to make predictions about what will happen. Some of this prediction work is concerned with what specific individuals will do. One could argue that this is an example of reading another person's mind. I would argue that this is a limited case of mind reading because it is based on expectations grounded in knowledge of previously observed behavior. (ibid., pp. 488-489)

Duranti rejects this example as a limited case of mindreading, although I would say that it is no example of mindreading at all: it goes unnoticed by Duranti that suspecting that someone might come and get on someone's nerves does neither involve mental state inference nor mental state attribution or mindguessing. Duranti then argues that it is "a different type of situation when a speaker shows that he or she has interpreted what someone else has just done or said as evidence of some specific desire that the person has not made explicit" (2008, p. 489). In his second example, little O. rejects some smaller pieces of banana until she is

offered the biggest piece. Her older sister R. comments on this and "ascribes to her younger sister the specific wish not only to get a bigger piece but 'the very big one'" (ibid.). Duranti comments on this:

> What is important in this example is that little O. has not said that she wants the biggest piece. She has merely rejected the pieces that her mother has tried to give her. For this reason R.'s statement that O. wants the biggest piece available must count as an inference about what O. is thinking but not saying. (ibid.)

One could ask, however, whether R's statement must really count as a mental state inference and as an example for mindreading since R's statement is given *after* O. has already received the biggest piece. Therefore, her statement can also be interpreted as a simple description of what has already happened. In this case, the mental state verb "want" can be used to redescribe in mentalistic terms the entire interaction without any need for an "inference about what O. is thinking but not saying" (ibid.). However, saying that O. wants the biggest piece is at least a case of mental state attribution.

Summing up, we cannot agree with Duranti's conclusion that his examples "demonstrate that some kind of mind reading obviously goes on in Samoa" (ibid., p. 490). Interestingly, however, Duranti adds that his examples might "might also indicate that children are more likely than adults to engage in this type of mind reading" (ibid.). This resonates with Ochs' suggestion that lower-ranking persons in Samoa have to decenter rather than higher-ranking ones (cf. Ochs, 1988).

But apart from my critique of Duranti's example: of course there are examples of mental state inference in Samoa. Let me give an example from my own experiences in Samoa (information on my field-work in Samoa will be provided in the next chapter). One morning, my whole guest-family left on a pick-up to a nearby village in order to do some shopping. I didn't join them, and in our hut, their 2-1/2 year old son was still asleep. Silently, in a sneaky way, they went to the pick-up. I whispered to my host-mother: "Why are you leaving like this?" And she said: "He will be angry when he realizes that we are leaving without him." In this moment, the young boy woke up, saw his parents and sibs near the pickup, began to cry and got pretty angry. Apparently, my host-mother had correctly inferred his mental state, although it might have been on the basis of previously observed behaviour. Nevertheless, a mental state was inferred. Mental state attributions occur as soon as mental states terms are ascribed, be it silently or aloud. Eleanor Ruth Gerber listed about 50 Samoan emotion terms in her study on

Samoan emotions in 1985. The mere existence of emotion terms proves that mental state attributions do occur; and as soon as these terms are used – for example in gossip – mental-state-talk occurs. Moreover, the mere existence of these terms presupposes that they can potentially be expressed. In Samoan language, terms related to feelings of anger are especially elaborated. For example, *lotomamā* is used to describe the absence of angry thoughts, *'o'ono* is used for suppressed anger, *ita* and *fa'ali'i* can be translated as angry and *fa'a'u'ū* means "sulky". In Samoa, anger is an elaborated emotion precisley *because* one should not let it out in interactions (especially when higher-ranking persons are present), precisely *because* it is so important not to lose face. This also demonstrates that opaque exteriors are not in contrast to a strong awareness and verbal elaboration of inner mental states. Anger must be suppressed and is so highly elaborated because it threatens group harmony. But the high elaboration and suppresion *presuppose* the possibility of its outburst, and an outburst is nothing else than directly perceivable expression.

As described above, children in Samoa might sometimes have to guess what is in a higher-ranking person's mind in order to grasp the meaning of a command, for example. Mindguessing does also occur when people have to adjust their behaviour while being observed. Since people in Samoa are under constant social scrutiny, behaving correctly (*aga*) requires the continuous anticipation of how others might evaluate one's actions. This can, for standard situations, be done by a simple reliance on rules of comportment. In more ambiguous situations, however, or in situations where rules of comportment are of little help or suggest two possible behaviours, mindguessing is the only possibility left for anticipating others' potential evaluations. We have seen above that Duranti (2008) tried to observe mindreading and mental state attribution as it occurs in everyday interaction (2008). Yet instead of observing people in their everyday interactions, we could also ask them directly whether they think about other people's mental states. In this case, the approach that might sound most naïve in an anthropologist's ear could be quite telling, at least if the interviewees simply started to mindguess without hesitation – if they don't, then anthropologists might object that direct questions do rarely lead to satisfying answers. But what if they started to explicitly guess what is in another person's mind? At this point, I will present three short interviews I did on my second trip to Samoa in 2010. Since the result of these interviews fits quite well into the present subchapter and since the empirical part of this work does focus on experimental studies, I will present them on the following pages in smaller type size.

One of the interviewees was part of my guest family, the other two were interviewed in the context of my experimental studies in a primary school. Surprisingly, the answers I got do not even prove the prevalence of opacity claims. Admittedly, I interviewed only a handful of people and with limited knowledge of Samoan, which is why I could not dig deeper directly after receiving an answer. The interviewees' answers were audiorecorded and later transcribed and translated with the help of Samoan assistants. At this point, however, I want to refer to the principle of falsification: few examples of explicit guessing of what is going on in another person's mind in Samoa would be enough to question the prevalence of opacity claims and help not to hype the fact that they exist.
The following extracts of my conversations with Samoans provide examples that strongly contrast with the notion of opacity claims we have heard about up to this point (A = Author, interviewer; I = Interviewee). The English translations are word-to-word translations. This results in bad English – however, the translation is thus very close to the original Samoan answers and free from additional interpretation.

The first interview was done with a **26 year-old father** of one child who lives in a very rural area of Savai'i and works as a teacher in a primary school. He was giving the most representative answer one could think of when looking for statements that potentially cast doubt on the prevalence of opacity claims in Samoa:

A: E mafai ona e mate le mafaufauga o isi tagata?

*Can you guess the thought of another person?*

I: E mafai!

*I can!*

This is, at least at first glimpse, like a perfect candidate to oppose the idea that opacity claims are widespread in Samoa. Moreover, it seems to confirm that mindguessing occurs in Samoa. However, one could argue that the question is not specific enough and might have been interpreted by the interviewee differently. To a slightly varied question, the man provided the following example.

A: E mafai ona e mate sa‘o o le mafaufauga o isi tagata?

*Can you correctly guess the thought of another person?*

I: O le isi tagata la e iloa o lo ta mafaufau e mafai, tusa e vice-versa, e mafai ona o ta mate le mafaufau o le isi tagata i ana mea e fai, ah, fa'ata'ita'iga fa'apea e, o sa ta friend o sa'u uo. A fa'apea o sa´u uo teine, ah, for example, o la'u uo teine ia ma sa ta uo tama foi a ah, tusa o la e close a maua ma la´u uo teine, ae iai la ta uo tama, ta te vaai ai a i isi taimi, tele a ina ,… tusa a, tusa a, a ta'u a a´u e la'u friend tama lea o lo'u uso, ah. E ta te va'ai atu a i isi taimi, e close tele ai la'u uo tama i la'u uo teine lea, la ua tupu loa ma lo'u mafaufau, pei a la'a, la tipi a'u e la'u uo teine lea, ae alu i la'u uo tama. E alu alu a, e sa'o a lo'u mafaufau, o la'u mate na sa'o a, la e tele ina tipi a'u e la'u uo teine, ae feiloa'i loa ma la'u uo tama lea.

*Some Person who knows our thought, it is possible, like vice-versa, we can guess the thought of another person by the things he does, for example, our friend, my friend. For example my girlfriend, ah, for example, my girlfriend and my boyfriend too, like we are close with my girlfriend, but I had a boyfriend and we met sometimes, often,…. so, so that I was called by my boyfriend his brother, ah. Then I saw at some time, my boyfriend was very close with my girlfriend, so my thought developed, like that, that girlfirend of mine will cut me off and go to my boyfriend. Time goes by, and my thought, my guess was right, I was cut by my girlfriend and she then went around with this boyfriend of mine.*

Still, one might argue that this does not necessarily involve something like mindguessing, since what is predicted is a certain course of events. In this view, the quotation simply reveals his own thoughts and his creeping suspicion. Notice, however, that the interviewee himself provided this anecdote as an example for my question whether he can correctly guess the thought of another person. Moreover, he says that it is possible to guess the thought of another person by the things he does – and this fits very well with the mindguessing definition developed in chapter 2, although the example he gives does not clearly demonstrate this.

The second interview was done with the **53 year-old sister** of my guest-father. She lives in a small rural village on Savai'i and has two daughters. When she was younger, she used to work in a hotel where tourists from overseas stayed. Therefore, her English was quite good. Nevertheless, she gave her answers in Samoa.

A: E iai se taimi e te mafaufau po'o a ni mea o lo'o mafaufau iai isi tagata?

*Is there a time you think what are some things that another person are thinking?*

I: Ioe! E iai, ah. E iai le taimi oute..oute nofo ma ou mafaufau, pea po'o lea se mea o manatu lo'u tuagane e fai ia te a'u, ah, po'o manatu lo'u tuagane i se mea e fai ah. Ioe, e iai le masalao, ah, e iai le

masalo, ou te masalosalo lava e iai se mea o lo‘o mana´o ai ia, ah;...Tinei ia te a‘u, ah. E iai se mea o la e manatu Tinei e fia tau mai ia te a‘u, ah. Ioe!..e iai.

*Yes! There is, yes. There is the time when I… I sit and I think, what is the thing or is this the thing my brother says/does to me, ah, if my brother is thinking about something to do. Yes, there is the speculation, ah, there is the speculation, I am really speculating if there is something he wants, ah... Tinei want from me, ah. Is there something Tinei thinks that he wants to tell me. Yes! … there is.*

Notably, the words “I am really speculating if there is something he wants” and “Is there something Tinei thinks that he wants to tell me” are clear mindguessing examples and contrast with anything like a strong reading of Samoan opacity claims. Moreover, they contradict Ochs’ observation that mental states in Samoa are not a suitable object for speculation (cf. Ochs 1988).
The following quotation is again an example for mindguessing. Although her guess what the other person wants might be based on routine or previous experience with that other woman, she still guesses what the other woman might *want*. Therefore, the object of her guess is again a mental state.

A: E mafai ona e mate mafaufauga o isi tagata?

*Is it possible to guess the thoughts of another person?*

PAUSE

I: O le isi taimi.....e..e..e mafai, ah; pe a (pe‘a?) ta tilotilo lelei iai le tagata, e pei o; fa‘apea a ou alu, ou te alu foi nale ou te vaai atu o la ete sau, ah, ou te maitaua a o le fafine le la, e masani a ona ou vaaia e lalaga le ietoga po‘o le fala. O´u vaai atu loa ua sau le fafine ia te a‘u, ia e tasi la‘u mate fa‘apea, ai foi e sau ia,e sau Sieni ia te a‘u e mana‘o i se lauie, ah. E iai la le taimi e mateia ai e a‘u le mea la e mana‘o iai le tagata.

*Sometimes… it, it, it is possible, ah; when take a good look at the person, for example; like when I go, I go over there and I see that you are coming, ah, but I recongnise there that woman over there, I use to see her weaving fine mats or mats. So I see that the woman is coming to me, and I have one single guess like this: Probably she is coming again, Sieni is coming to me because she wants pandanus leaves, ah. There is the time where I guess the thing the person wants.*

Later in the interview, she confirms that her guess was indeed correct.

More in line with opacity claims seems to be the beginning of the following conversation with a **34 year-old mother of 3 children**, who started to give answers in English until I told her to use Samoan. This woman lived in one of the most remote areas of Savai'i, in a village about 2-3 hours away from the ferry that connects Savai'i with the main island Upolu. I interviewed her in a primary school after experimentally testing children there, since she came to pick up her child (or children). In the course of the conversation, this woman reveals herself to be a competent 'mindguesser' who carefully monitors others' facial expressiveness.

A: E iai se taimi e te mafaufau poʻo a ni mea o loʻo mafaufau iai isi tagata?

*Is there some time you are thinking about what are some things other people are thinking?*

I: No. Only me and my husband, my children…thoughts everytime, doesn't matter another people. LAUGHS.

A: Leai?

*No?*

I: Leai.

*No.*

A: E mafai ona e mate le mafaufauga o isi tagata?

*Can you guess the thoughts of other people?*

I: Ia! I can…

A: Faʻa Samoa!

*In Samoan!*

I: …ou te mafai ona ou iloa le mea la e mafaufau iai le isi tagata, e faʻaali mai i ona foliga ah, i ona manatu, e iloa la e aʻu le mea la e manaʻo ai le tagata, le isi tagata ia te aʻu, ah. E mafai ona ou mateina le mea la e mafaufau ai le isi.....

*…I can because I know the thing other people think, it shows on their faces, ah, their thought, so I know that thing the person wants, the other person from me, ah. I can guess the thing another person is thinking about.*

Another example is worth mentioning, although I have not audiorecorded it. **A woman around 40** who was working in Apia with an Australian boss replied with a paradigmatic opacity claim to my question whether she sometimes thinks about what other people are thinking. She clearly denied this and said that she is not interested in that. However, when the Australian boss – who had known this woman for a long time and supported my research – asked her the same question in a more colloquial style, expressing that he can't believe this, she suddenly opened up and said that she sometimes wonders whether her husband thinks of other women.

The examples just presented are few and do probably not fulfil the requirements of anthropological, qualitative research. However, I think that they are good enough to relativize the opacity claims observed in Samoa and to demonstrate that Samoans *do* think about what is going on in other persons' minds.

With respect to 'mindreading' in Samoa, the conclusion is therefore very similar to the one that was drawn for the whole bunch of anthropological studies at the end of the previous chapter: a great deal of what is usually associated with the term 'mindreading' is common in Samoa as well. Again, we cannot answer the status of false belief understanding by simply looking at the different anthropological reports. The next chapter will therefore focus on false belief understanding in Samoa.

### 5.7 Empathy in Samoa

In the previous chapter, I have already introduced the idea that empathy might have something to do with attachment. This idea was put forward in the anthropological context by Jeannette Mageo, who specializes in Samoa. Mageo's (2011) main idea is to conceptualize empathy as "re-directed attachment". Intuitively, this makes sense. De Waal tells us that the "selection pressure to evolve rapid emotional connectedness likely started in the context of parental care long before our species evolved" (2008, p. 282) and thus links the capacity for emotional connectedness, which is considered to be an important aspect of empathy, to parental care. He goes on: "Once the empathic capacity existed, it could be applied outside the rearing context and play a role in the wider network of social relationships" (ibid.). Using a more 'biological' vocabulary, de Waal actually confirms Mageo's idea. In arguing that attachment is realized differently across cultures, Mageo paves the way for different

'versions' of empathy that build on early attachment experiences. Mageo argues that the idea of sensitive mothering as an indicator and precondition for secure attachment "is so ideological a feature of US developmental models that it obscures distancing practices" (2011, p. 71). She says that distancing practices play "an equally fundamental role in developing culture styles of attachment and empathy" (ibid.). Therefore, people everywhere in the world use such practices to create insecurities in children – in Samoa as well as in the US, although the practices themselves might differ. According to Mageo, distancing in the US "begins at birth in the hospital with the separation of the infant from its family and continues through practices of leaving the child alone in its crib or in a fenced playpen while its mother leaves the room. Later the mother leaves the child with babysitters or at daycare" (ibid., pp. 79-80). Distancing practices create boundaries, and according to Mageo, this is precisely what makes empathy possible. The ability to distinguish between oneself and the other is indeed an important element in many definitions of empathy (cf. Decety & Jackson, 2004) which helps to distinguish it from other forms like emotional contagion. Distancing practices, from this point of view, help children to acknowledge the basic difference between self and other: "Caretakers prepare the way for empathy by forging boundaries that define social actors through distancing practices that generate insecure attachment" (Mageo, 2011, p. 71).

Mageo thus objects to Ainsworth's (1973) account which generally pathologizes insecure attachment, since aspects of insecure attachment must, according to Mageo, not necessarily be considered as a deficient mode of attachment. Rather, it is a constitutive aspect of socialization in every culture. Distancing practices help children to recognize boundaries, they are "crafted to curtail what elders view as boundary confusion: that is, unreflective identifications between individuals or groups that people in the culture regard as distinct" (Mageo, 2011, p. 72). Distancing practices therefore help to define social units that are supposed or not supposed to engage in empathic relations – and what these social units are differs across cultures. With respect to Samoa, Mageo argues that the basic social unit is the group rather than the individual. According to Mageo, "empathy is an extension of self across a boundary, however self is culturally defined" (ibid.). Distancing in Samoa frustrates children's desire for oneness with the primary caregiver and thus undermines "the prototype of the self-other bond that characterizes Western styles of attachment and empathy" (ibid., p. 75). At the same time, however, this helps children to redirect their desire to bond to other persons, to groups – and to develop empathy. For Mageo, empathy "is an as-if form of attachment: it appropriates and redirects a state (identification) and behaviors (love and care) that characterize attachment" (ibid., p. 72).

We have already heard that Samoan caregivers begin to distance their children and frustrate their desire for individual, exclusive attention from about 18 months of age onwards. At the same time, children become part of the community of siblings which includes children from other members of the extended family. From now on, older sisters and (less often) brothers care for the youngest one. Children now have to identify with a group instead of the mother, and they have to show behaviours that characterized the mother-child dyad towards members of this group. Mageo argues that "to the extent that a culture is group-oriented, normative attachment is among group members and empathy flows between groups: empathy is, then, to treat another group as if it were one's own" (ibid., pp. 72-73). Now if empathy in Samoa is not so much a matter between two individuals, but between groups or an individual and a group, then individual mental states might be less important. Mageo says that "only in cultures where cultural models of self emphasize inner experience is empathy a matter of seeing/feeling as if one were another" (ibid., p. 76) and points out the difference between empathy in different cultural contexts:

> Attachment in more individually oriented places inspires empathy as an imaginative identification of self with another, bridging the self/other divide. In more socially oriented locales, attachment leads to empathy as enacted: giving care in gifts, both material gifts like food but also more abstract gifts of service – what Samoans call *tautua* – to one's own group, and through ceremonies, feasts, and festivals to other groups.[24] (ibid., p. 78)

Here we find again the idea that empathy in Samoa is *enacted*. Mageo says that attachment in early life "inspires a state of identification, which in turn inspires attendant behaviors of love and care" (ibid., p. 69). All this confirms the importance of *alofa* (LCCP) in Samoa. However, *alofa* is not just a consequence of an imaginative identification of self with another, since this kind of identification is frustrated from early on. Rather, LCCP is the result of redirected attachment. This idea is also present in Gerber's work: "*Alofa* and the terms that are most closely related to it in meaning probably code a basic affect involved with social bonding" (1985, p. 153). This strongly supports my argument that empathy is primarily a compassionate response:

[24] It is important to mention that Mageo does not vote for a binary contrast between cultures: "Am I, then, arguing for a binary contrast between cultures of empathy? My effort has been to establish a heuristic for thinking about attachment and empathy along with the relations between them. In Samoa, there is ample evidence for hybrids that date back at least to Western contact" (2011, p. 87).

> While empathy does not equal kindness and support, these behaviors flow spontaneously toward a person or group to whom we feel attached. People learn to transfer these behaviors to new objects and to act *as if* they felt attached to them. (Mageo, 2011, pp. 86-87)

I have argued in the previous chapter that the reconsideration of the concept of empathy 'through the lense of attachment' might help us to better conceptualize and define empathy, since it would suggest to consider empathy as a primarily compassionate response towards a real, present (and important) other. I argued that empathy leads us to understand the 'how'-aspect of another's experience via imaginative processes and sharing. Moreover, I argued that this sharing might lead us to engage in behaviours associated with LCCP. According to Mageo, however, we redirect a state of identification that characterizes early attachment relationships when we are empathetic. Yet since early attachment is already characterized by LCCP, redirecting the state of identification that characterizes early attachment does result in LCCP *without* the necessity to grasp and share the 'how'-aspect of another's experience via imaginative processes or bodily empathy.
This leads us to ask whether grasping the 'how'-aspect of an individual's experience is important in Samoa at all. If not, we would not only have to *adapt* our empathy definition - we would have to do away with an important and central aspect of it. According to Mageo, empathy in Samoa is not "a matter of seeing/feeling as if one were another" (2011, p. 76), it is as-if form of attachment which leads us to identify with others. What happens when we identify with others? One might argue that identifying with others makes it even easier to grasp how they feel. However, identification might also lead one to minimize, downplay or even neglect the differences between oneself and the other. If teenagers identify with their peer group, the 'how'-aspect of another *individual's* experience is less important, since people expect their peers to be interested in the same things, to feel in a same way about them and so forth. To speak of identification might even imply that the boundaries between the self and the other get blurred or that they are not clearly recognized. Ontogenetically, however, it might be quite appropriate to speak of identification in this sense, since babies do not clearly distinguish between themselves and the mother. If empathy redirects a state of identification characteristic for early attachment relationships, is it then possible to learn something about empathy between adults by looking back at what characterizes early attachment? From a phenomenological point of view, it might be most adequate to say that the mother-infant dyad creates a shared space of attention and feeling in which certain emotions are jointly invoked

and co-constructed (cf. Stern, 1985). We tend to think of empathy as something which lets us *understand* the other in dyadic interactions. Yet if we take seriously the suggestion to think of empathy as redirected attachment, then we should question this focus on understanding, since what is going on in early attachment might be better described as *Einsfühlung*[25] (one-feeling) than *Einfühlung* (feeling into another person; empathy). Mother and infant jointly invoke specific emotions and feelings. In order to facilitate bonding, they co-constitute and co-construct a shared space in which mood, emotions, and feelings of both participants are co-regulated.

Does this tell us anything about our empathic encounters as adults? I think it at least hints to two important points, namely, the idea of joint negotiation and co-construction on the one hand and the attachment-function on the other. If I empathize with someone, the empathizee himself changes. In being empathized with, the feeling formerly experienced alone is now empathically assessed by another person. I argue that this very fact changes the feeling of the empathizee. Both co-construct an empathic situation in which the empathizee's wish to be empathized with and the empathizer's attempts to do so create a shared feeling that influences the formerly individually felt ones. Hollan and Throop say that what makes empathy difficult is "that even the people we are attempting to empathize with may not know why they think, act, or feel the way they do, or even *what* they think or feel at certain times" (2011, p. 8). This confirms that many empathic-processes might be about jointly negotiating feelings and co-constructing an empathic situation. This might help people to identify with each other. As a matter of fact, if empathy really develops out of our early attachment relationships and if empathy is redirected attachment, then empathy among adults might also be about attachment and bonding in the first place. In this view, creating a shared space for empathy might help to establish social bonds and to feel responsible for each other. And this might indeed be empathy's *primary* function.

What does all this tell us about empathy in Samoa? I have argued with reference to various anthropologists that Samoan childhood is very different from what children experience in more Western countries. Since children's autonomy is an important socialization goal in more individually-centered places (cf. Keller, 2007), we would expect joint negotiation and co-construction of feelings to become less in the course of childhood. Let me explain this. In Western culture, children are encouraged to talk about their desires and preferences, they are taught to rely on themselves and to find out for themselves what they want. Therefore, the joint negotiation and co-construction of feelings that characterized the early attachment

[25] I do not use the term *Einsfühlung* in Scheler's (1923) sense here. I simply use the term in order to make the

relationship is transformed into an *assessment* of them via interactions that emphasize the subjective life of the child. In asking their children what they want, prefer, intend, and desire, they learn that they have authority over how they feel and that other people's attempts to assess what they feel must be approved by themselves. In Samoa, in contrast, children are socialized to repress and subordinate their more private impulses in order to serve higher-ranking people and to understand themselves as being part of a group (peer, kin). Therefore, Samoan children learn exactly the opposite: in their daily actions, they have little freedom of choice and their personal preferences, desires and feelings are of minor importance and not in the center of others' attention (cf. Mageo, 1998). Socialization in Samoa emphasizes relatedness over autonomy. Therefore, individual feelings might not be treated as something of great importance that can and must be assessed in dyadic relationships. If it comes to feelings, joint negotiation and co-construction might be more important than individual authority over own feelings. Some anthropologists point in the same direction. Through an ethnographic and textual analysis of Nukulaelae gossip, Besnier (1995) does not only show how emotions are an object of gossip, he also demonstrates how they are produced and constituted jointly among gossipers. Nukulaelae belongs to Tuvalu, which is – like Samoa – a Polynesian island. Tuvaluan has borrowed considerably from Samoan and some people even speak Samoan there. According to Besnier, "gossip is a site for the *production* of emotions. In other words, Nukulaelae gossipers and, I would surmise, gossipers in many other societies…use gossip to trigger certain emotional experiences among themselves" (Besnier, 1995, p. 231). Although Besnier admits that emotional experiences might well be available to the individual, he says that "they are nevertheless best achieved communally, in the same fashion that the representation of emotions in gossip narratives is jointly produced"(ibid.). In his view, those emotions do not automatically disappear when attempted gossip fails, but they become socially irrelevant (ibid., p. 235). Besnier further argues that feelings which have become socially irrelevant are also difficult to sustain:

> Without the participation of others, gossip itself and the emotions that are elaborated in gossip (anger, disgust, outrage) are difficult to sustain, and, while they may stay with particular individuals for a certain period of time, there are strong social motivations for them to disappear. In short, emotions associated with gossip emerge in the context of social interaction. (ibid.)

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point that what is going on in early attachment relationships is not primarily about feeling-*into* the other.

As a consequence, Besnier suggests to consider emotion attribution as a cooperative task:

> The implication of these patterns is that the representation and attribution of emotion categories are *cooperative tasks*: emotion attribution is jointly achieved by the quoting and the quoted parties if the emotion is identified in a reported speech string, and it is jointly achieved by the gossiper and his or her interlocutors when the former leadthe latter to name the relevant emotion. Without relying on other people`s contributions, it is very difficult to conduct gossip successfully and, in particular, to attribute to third parties morally suspect emotions. (ibid., p. 230)

While the former quotation might suggest that Besnier refers only to the verbal attribution of emotion categories, the following words make clear that it is also one's own emotional experience that is shaped by interactional processes in a cooperative and joint manner:

> the creation and maintenance of the "right" emotional tenor is *jointly constructed* by the various participants involved. Achieving the proper emotional tenor is thus not a simple matter of displaying the emotions that the speaker experiences internally, but rather is a matter of finding a way to elicit a specific emotion from one`s interlocutor, and to maintain that particular emotion in focus and at a level of sufficient intensity. (ibid., p. 234)

Duranti extends the idea of joint constitution and co-construction to the domain of meaning: "For Samoans, meaning is jointly accomplished by speaker and audience. For this reason, a Samoan speaker does not reclaim the meaning of his words by saying 'I didn't mean it'" (1985, p. 49). According to Duranti, such a "practice of linguistic behavior sharply contrasts with the 'reflectionist view,' according to which the meaning of someone's words is given by his expressed/recognizable intentions" (ibid.). If an utterance would be nothing more than the expression of inner intentions, then "the audience's role is that of recognizing what is supposedly already there" (ibid.).

I have argued above that people who demonstrate opaque exteriors might also feel differently, since the feeling lying behind an expressed state is not the same as a feeling lying behind an unexpressed state. This seems to support the idea that individual feelings and their assessment in dyadic encounters might be of minor importance in more group-oriented places like Samoa. Opaque exteriors and opacity claims do not only force joint negotiation of emotions in cases

in which they become publicly relevant, they are themselves, so to speak, the result of a community's joint negotiation to deemphasize and conceal emotional expressiveness.

In a nutshell, it might indeed be possible that the 'how'-aspect of another's experience, or, more generally, dyadic forms of empathy are less important and deemphasized in places like Samoa. We should not take this as the ultimate truth, however. In this chapter, we have also encountered some aspects of empathy developed in chapters 3 and 4. From very early on, children have to attend to what higher-ranking people expect them to do, which sometimes requires grasping their intentions (cf. Ochs, 1988). This involves a certain degree of decentering or perspective-taking *in dyads*. Mageo claimed that empathy is "a matter of seeing/feeling as if one were another" (2011, p. 76) only in individually oriented places. But at least in situations where one has to grasp another's intention, perspective-taking indeed *is* a matter of seeing as if one were the other in Samoa as well. Mageo's account emphasizes the importance of *alofa*: "In Samoa, the word for empathy is *alofa*" (2011, p. 77). This is confirmed by Ochs (1988), who tells us that caregivers try to evoke empathy or love in small children and says that these feelings are referred to by *alofa* (ibid., p. 149). Gerber says that "the feeling of alofa is viewed as being owed to everyone" (1985, p. 145). Interestingly, she describes a situation informants paradigmatically invoke when they have to describe *alofa*:

> The scenario frequently invoked to illustrate this sense of alofa as a minimal behavioral requirement is as follows: an old person, often portrayed as a stranger, is seen walking along the road, carrying a heavy burden. It is hot, and perhaps the elder seems ill or tired. The appropriate response in this instance is a feeling of alofa, which implies helpful or giving actions such as taking over the burden or providing a cool drink and a place to rest. (Gerber, 1985, p. 145)

This description is interesting for several reasons. First, *alofa* is triggered by the direct perception of someone. Although it is not clear whether *alofa* is triggered via bodily resonance or via rules of how one should behave when seeing someone, it is still interesting that this scenario depicts *alofa* as a reaction to someone who is in a pitiable state or condition. Second, the person that triggers *alofa* is not only alone, it is also a stranger. If *alofa* is the Samoan word for empathy and thus the result of redirected empathy, then the depicted scenario suggests that *alofa* is also a reaction towards a *singular* person. This relativizes Mageo's claim that empathy in group-oriented cultures flows between groups and amounts to treating another group as if it were one's own (2011, pp. 72-73). The example is rather a case

of treating an unfamiliar *single person* as if it were part of one's own group. Framing empathy in this way, however, attenuates the distinction between a group-oriented and individuum-centered empathy. Again, both kinds of empathy appear to be prevalent in every culture, while each culture might emphasize and prefer one of them. Moreover, we have seen in the previous chapter that even interactions structured around enacted opacity might require something like empathic attunement sensu Groark (2008, in press). Finally, any argument or contradictory anthropological report that does not describe Samoans as people who attach to and identify with groups rather than single individuals poses a problem for Mageo's account or at least casts doubt on it. Derek Freeman, for example, clearly argued against the notion of multiple attachment in Samoa (1983, p. 203). But even if Freeman were right and dyadic attachment to the primary caregivers was as important in Samoa as elsewhere, it is hard to deny that the focus on others, especially on the extended family and meaningful groups (for example out of the same village) receives more emphasis in Samoa.

Summing up, we can say that Mageo's account does not capture more dyadic aspects of empathy as discussed in previous chapters - and it is hard to believe that such dyadic forms of empathy should not occur in Samoa at all. Nevertheless, Mageo's idea is refreshing and adds new and important aspects. Most interesting for the present work is the idea that cultures might differ with respect to what is primarily important for them: understanding the 'how'-aspect of others' experiences or identifying with them. In more individually oriented places that foster dyadic empathy, understanding the 'how'-aspect of another's experience might lead to a willingness to consequently identify with them and therefore to enact LCCP. Moreover, grasping the 'how'-aspect of another's experience can also be considered an aspect of LCCP in these places, since an empathetic attitude towards oneself is experienced *as* care and compassion. In more group-oriented cultures like Samoa, however, it might rather be the other way round: identifying with people of one's own group or another group via redirecting attachment comes first and results in LCCP. Rather than grasping how another individual feels, feelings are jointly negotiated and co-constructed. Importantly, however, all this is a matter of emphasis. Joint negotiation and co-construction play a role in dyadic empathic encounters in individually-centered cultures as well, and forms of dyadic empathy are certainly also present in Samoa. Mageo's account offers a heuristic which might inspire further research and which calls attention to the link between empathy and attachment.

For the third time in this work, we are now able to rethink and refine our definition of empathy and to adjust it to Mageo's ideas. Here is the last definition developed at the end of chapter 4 again:

Empathy
1) is a primarily compassionate reaction which normally results in behaviours associated with LCCP
2) is triggered either by resonating with another's expressed emotional state or one's own bodily resonances and somatic reactions towards another's opaque exterior in his or her presence
3) involves imaginative processes and sharing in order to grasp the 'how'-aspect of another's experience or empathic attunement in order to respect the boundaries of another's subjective life

An adjusted definition of empathy should consist of the following points:

Empathy
1) is a primarily compassionate reaction which normally results in behaviours associated with LCCP and which has its roots in primary attachment relationships
2) is triggered either by
– resonating with another's expressed emotional state
– one's own bodily resonances and somatic reactions towards another's opaque exterior
– redirected attachment that leads to identify with someone or a group
3) leads us
– to understand the 'how'-aspect of another's experience in individually-oriented cultures
– via imaginative processes and sharing, which helps us to identify with and attach to others
– to identify with and attach to others in more group-oriented cultures and to jointly negotiate and co-construct feelings
4) usually results in behaviours associated with LCCP

### 5.8 Summary

Samoans assert the opacity of other minds. Ochs observed a widespread dispreference for explicit guessing and other processes of clarification for unintelligible utterances especially between children and their caregivers. She explains this by arguing that caregiving in Samoa is organized by social rank. In this view, guessing another person's mind is not generally impossible or prohibited in Samoa – its possibility depends on whether the person in question is of higher or lower rank. Consequently, Ochs does not support a strong opacity reading. For Mageo, the fact that Samoans "are generally indefinite about their own interior life and forswear the possibility of fathoming anyone else's" (1998, p. 64) becomes understandable in the light of socialization practices that suppress the more private aspects of the self in favor of appropriate behaviour. In this view, we can interpret opacity assertions in a psychoanalytic

sense: if spontaneously arising desires, thoughts, and action plans are repressed in oneself because they are considered as morally suspect and if they consequently cannot be shared with others, then the opacity claim observed by Gerber that "We cannot know what is in another person's depth" (1985, p. 133) could be understood as a commonly shared assertion that actually repeats on an explicit and culturally accepted level what was experienced individually in childhood and had to be repressed, namely, that one is not allowed to know his own depths and to act them out. In the course of socialization, this is transformed into the credo – or, doctrine - that one cannot know what is in another person's depth. In doing so, one's own experience is generalized and projected onto the other. Mageo's account is at least supported by some observations of Ochs concerning parental control strategies as well as by observations from Freeman that point in the same direction and explain the difference between outer appearance and inner experience. Note, however, that Ochs also adds something to Mageo's description: whereas self-assertive behaviour of children in Mageo's account is transformed via practices of shaming and teasing, Ochs states that assertive behaviour *is desired* as long as it is not demonstrated in front of higher-ranking people who must be respected. Gerber was confronted with opacity claims when she asked her informants about emotions and concluded that Samoans attend more to the social context and to social consequences of emotions than to their individual, inner correlates and effects. Shore's account is very much in line with Mageo's and stresses the socialization goal to change behaviour led by *āmio* to behaviour led by *aga*. This opens up the possibility to interpret Samoans' assertions of opacity from a different angle. Since Samoans focus on *aga* rather than *āmio*, opacity claims can also be seen as a confirmation of people's belief that others will rather stick to their role than to their individual desires and motivations. Samoans clearly know about others' private subjective life (*loto*) and they engage in a variety of 'mindreading' practices like mental state attribution, mental state talk, mental state inference and mindguessing. Although these practices might also serve the function to predict and explain behaviour, behaviour might be better explained and predicted in many situations by reference to one's social role, since mature Samoans are expected to impose *aga* over *āmio*.

There is a third way to interpret Samoan opacity claims. In one of Duranti's (1988) examples presented above, Loa is accused by Iuli for having announced the arrival of the M.P. who did not appear. This example suggests that Samoans must play safe when speaking on behalf of someone or when saying something towards others which might turn out not to be true. At least, this seems to be true when higher-ranking people (e.g. *matai*) are involved. With this in

mind, the following words of Duranti are probably his most convincing attempt to explain Samoan opacity claims:

> A number of ethnographic accounts show that the very act of bringing out in public one's speculations on the mental activity of others makes speakers worry about potential retaliation. Hence, from a sociocultural point of view, the phenomenon of the opacity doctrine might be seen as a defense strategy against the accountability that comes with making claims about what others think or want … It could turn out that the opacity doctrine hides or at least implies a pan-human preoccupation with reducing one's accountability. (2008, p. 493)

For Duranti, opacity claims are mainly a defense strategy applied to reduce accountability and he even tries to provide Samoan 'mindreading-examples' from his own fieldwork. Moreover, he suggests that opacity doctrines do not work in all contexts (cf. Duranti, 2008). Clearly, he doesn't support a strong opacity reading. The few interviewpartners in my own fieldwork who directly engaged in mindguessing and explicitly confirmed that they sometimes guess what is in another person's mind fit quite well to Duranti's interpretation. Since the interviewees could choose their own mindguessing-examples, they obviously chose examples that were not problematic: they were not accountable for them and therefore had not to claim opacity when confronted with my questions.

With respect to empathy, I have argued that aspects of empathy from previous chapters like perspective-taking, LCCP, and empathic attunement sensu Groark occur in Samoa as well. Moreover, I have presented Mageo's idea to consider empathy as redirected attachment or an as-if form of attachment. According to Mageo, it is the redirection of the state of identification which characterizes early attachment towards others that leads to behaviours associated with LCCP (*alofa* in Samoa). Importantly, Mageo argues that empathy understood this way can either be directed to individuals in more individually-centered cultures where dyadic relationships are of central importance, or to groups in more group-oriented cultures where relationships between groups (for example kin groups) are most important. This poses a problem for the definition of empathy developed in the previous chapters of this work, since grasping the 'how'-aspect of another's experience should consequently not be as central in more group-oriented places like Samoa. Building on Mageo's idea, I tried to characterize early attachment relationships and argued that they are more about co-constructing and jointly negotiating feelings in order to allow bonding and identification with the primary caregiver.

Therefore, I suggested that joint negotiation and co-construction might be more important in group-centered places while assessing the 'how'-aspect of another's experience might be more relevant in individually-centered places.

This chapter is based on different anthropological accounts, yet we have detected striking similarities. Ochs and Duranti were working in the same village and both focused on language use in the light of local epistemologies of what can and cannot become an object of speculation. I have pointed out the similarities of Mageo's and Shore's account and argued that Gerber's work as well as Ochs' description of control strategies of caregivers resonate with theirs, too. But one element plays an important part in all accounts and unites them in a certain sense. All of what has been described by the different authors can be seen in the light of Samoans' sociocultural orientation to emphasize relatedness instead of individual autonomy (cf. Keller, 2007). If we ask why meaning is jointly constructed in a Samoan fono without considering individual intentions (Duranti), why caregivers tease and shame children in order to repress their desire for individual attention (Mageo), why Samoans repress anger and show respect (Gerber), why children's unintelligible utterances are not clarified by higher-ranking caregivers (Ochs), and why empathy in Samoa might be directed to groups rather than individuals (Mageo), then we always arrive at the same answer: because children have to focus on others and their relationships and not on themselves.

Importantly, the detailed analyses in this chapter did not only help to contextualize the reported opacity claims for Samoa, they also revealed that none of the anthropologists mentioned suggested that the observed phenomena directly challenge theory of mind or that they support the idea that sociality without empathy is possible (cf. Robbins & Rumsey, 2008). In the next and final chapter, I will focus on one aspect of the 'mindreading tool kit' which still needs to be clarified: false belief understanding.

## 6. False belief understanding in Samoa

A closer look at the existing anthropological data from different places across Central America as well as the Pacific revealed that there is no need to assume that opacity doctrines should force a rethinking of theory of mind. Quite on the contrary, we have seen that almost all aspects of the conceptual tool kit developed in this work can be found in those locales as well, including mental state attribution, mental-state-talk, mindguessing and mental state inference. The same holds true for Samoa. Yet since false belief understanding is so closely tied to its experimental measurement, the different reports can principally not say very much on how false belief understanding develops in the corresponding places. Therefore, three different false belief studies were run in Samoa. To my knowledge, the present studies constitute the largest sample for a single locale and, as we will shortly see, they appear to demonstrate the largest delay in false belief understanding among normally developing children reported so far. Before I present the studies, I will present some relevant cross-cultural ToM studies.

### 6.1 Theory of Mind research across cultures

Ten years ago, one of the most prominent researchers on children's theory of mind said that most of the results stem from a homogeneous research and cultural worldview (Wellman, 1998). Meanwhile, there have been quite a lot of cross-cultural studies on theory of mind and especially false belief understanding. Many of them suggest synchrony in the onset of false belief understanding, others suggest variability. Avis and Harris (1991), for example, found that preliterate Baka children in southeast Cameroon passed at an age comparable to that seen in European and North American studies. They succeeded in transferring an unexpected transfer paradigm to local circumstances in rural Cameroon. An influential meta-analysis by Wellman and colleagues (2001) tried to organize the existing findings of more than 500 studies on false belief understanding. The improvement between three and five years of age could be confirmed across the different testing procedures of the studies. Because the meta-analysis also included studies that were conducted in non-Western countries, it does not support the idea that false belief understanding might be a culture-specific product or open to cultural variability and so the authors conclude that a mentalistic understanding of persons, including a sense of internal representations, is widespread (Wellman et al., 2001).

In contrast to these findings, more and more studies from different locales report differences in children's early social experiences (Keller, 2007) as well as variability in the onset of false

belief understanding. Vinden (1996) used two tasks examining children's understanding of false belief among other tasks that focused on representational change and the appearance-reality distinction among 34 Junín Quechua children between four and eight years of age in the Peruvian highlands. The tasks were conducted by a native collaborator. Children between four and eight years of age performed poor on the change of location task and the other tasks that were used to assess their understanding of mind. Naito and Koyama (2006) conducted three experiments on the development of Japanese children's false belief understanding and reported a delay as well as a general cultural difference in reasoning about human action. Children in their study developed full false belief understanding between 6 and 7 years of age. A meta-analysis by Liu and colleagues (2008) demonstrates parallel developmental trajectories but substantially different timetables across locales. They report that Canadian children start performing above chance on false belief tasks around 38 months whereas Hong Kong children do so around 64 months, which is more than two years later. Furthermore, the authors report that although Chinese children have earlier competence at executive function tasks than North American children, this did not translate into better false belief performance. This finding stands in contrast to accounts suggesting that failure on false belief tasks might be due to limitations in executive control.

What most of the cross-cultural studies on false belief understanding have in common is that the chosen countries were not chosen with regard to existing anthropological literature. Experimental psychologists were mainly interested in whether theory of mind development is universal or not. As a consequence, every culture that significantly differed from Western culture was a suitable candidate for cross-cultural experimental research. The common inconsideration of the cultural context and the neglect of existing anthropological literature might precisely be a reason for the diverging results in cross-cultural theory of mind research and for the lack of appropriate explanations that might account for them. The theoretical part of this work might have convinced the reader that some locales are especially interesting for psychological research. There are, to my knowledge, only two published false belief studies from places where opacity claims were reported. Oberle (2009) did research on Yap and Fais, which both belong to the Federate States of Micronesia. Since Throop (2008) reported opacity from his own research on Yap island, I will only focus on Oberle's false belief results for Yap children. Oberle used a classical surprise-content task and culturally adjusted research material: a box of chewing gum that contained a betelnut and a hand puppet. Children saw the box of chewing gum and were asked what they think is inside. Then they were shown the actual content (a betelnut). Finally, a hand puppet was introduced and children were asked

what the puppet would think is inside. Children were scored as passing the false belief question if they answered that the puppet would think there is chewing gum inside the box.

On Yap Island, Oberle tested 43 children. Three out of 17 3-year-old children succeeded in the false belief condition (18%) as compared to 22 out of 26 5-year-olds (88%). This difference was significant at $p<0.001$. Therefore, although Throop (2008) reported opacity claims as well as opaque exteriors from Yap, children's false belief understandings seems to develop like among Western children. In another study, Callaghan and colleagues (2005) investigated mental state reasoning in Canada, Peru, Thailand, India, and Samoa with a different false belief paradigm that involves a change of location. The authors found that children in all five countries improve in a comparable way between three and five years of age and claimed that the age of onset of mental state reasoning might be universal across cultures. Together with Oberle's results, this is the second study which confirms the expected developmental trajectory between 3- and 5 years of age in a place where opacity is reported (Samoa). In all five countries, the majority of the 3-year-olds significantly failed. In the group of the 4-year-olds, however, the difference between those who pass and those who fail was not significant in all countries *except* Samoa, where 18 out of 25 children still failed ($p<.05$). Moreover, while the majority of the 5-year-old children clearly passed the task in Canada and Peru ($p<.001$) as well as in Thailand and India ($p<.01$), only 13 out of 18 children in Samoa passed the task ($p<.10$). This is neither a convincing *p*-value nor is it a convincing sample size. With regard to the question whether the onset of mental state reasoning across cultures is universal it would be interesting to have a closer look at this difference. Like the majority of cross-cultural psychologists, Callaghan and colleagues were apparently not interested in the anthropological data available for those countries. Otherwise, they should have been more interested in the fact that just in Samoa, where people are reported to assert the opacity of other minds, children did not perform as convincingly as in the other places.

It is also noticeable that the false belief paradigms applied so far were not explicitly constructed for the application in a specific cultural environment. Cross-cultural psychologists do not start their research on the basis of anthropological data which might suggest to design a task in a specific, culture-fair way. Usually, classical paradigms are simply translated and adapted with respect to the materials involved (Avis & Harris, 1991; Oberle, 2009). To my knowledge, no cross-cultural study on false belief understanding has tried to adapt the interactions involved in an experimental procedure to local expectations and culturally appropriate forms of adult-child interaction. This has been criticized again and again by

cultural anthropologists (e.g. Besnier, 1995). Study 3 in this chapter tries to improve this situation.

## 6.2 Empirical Part: False belief studies in Samoa

In the conclusion of the first part of this work, I have pointed out that none of the anthropologists working in Samoa, although observing opacity claims, suggested that we should rethink ToM. I have demonstrated that mental state attributions, mental state talk, mindguessing and mental state inferences occur in Samoa, despite of opacity claims. Moreover, the study of Callaghan and colleagues (2005) seems to empirically support the intuition that Robbins and Rumsey's claim according to which opacity doctrines should force us to rethink ToM is probably exaggerated. However, I have argued above that the result of the Samoan sample in Callaghan et al.'s (2005) study is not as convincing as the results in the other countries investigated. The logic behind running more false belief experiments in Samoa is the following: if the results of Callaghan and colleagues can be confirmed using more than one experimental paradigm, then this would be a convincing empirical result against the idea that opacity doctrines should force us to rethink ToM. In other words: Running more and perhaps more convincing false belief studies with a larger sample in Samoa is the easiest way to ward off Robbins and Rumsey's suggestion and to prove the last part of our conceptual 'mindreading' tool kit. On the other hand, if false belief understanding among Samoan children should turn out to be delayed, this does not necessarily imply that opacity doctrines are the *causal* factor, since experimental results in different cultural settings are open to a variety of critical interpretations. We will come back to this point later.
The first experiment, the so-called Cup-task, is very similar to the task applied by Callaghan et al. (2005). My aim was to test whether I would get the same results with an almost identical task. Small variations in the procedure and translation were made, however. I will discuss these differences below in more detail. The second experiment used again the same task and another translation, since interviews with Samoans led me to doubt the appropriateness of a specific word that was included in the first translation. Interestingly, it is the same word that was also used in Callaghan et al.'s study. The third experiment, the so-called "Bring-me!"-task, was especially designed for typical forms of adult-child interaction in Samoa and uses commands. The Cup-task is a paradigmatic example of an *explicit verbal prediction task*, while the "Bring-me!"-task falls into the category of *active behavioural response in interaction tasks*. For practical reasons, I did not add a looking behaviour task to my empirical studies. However, looking behaviour tasks do not require to actively respond to the task

demands, neither verbally nor behaviourally (see chapter 2), and they are usually applied to infants – therefore, I assumed that they might be less appropriate when it comes to investigating the relationship between opacity doctrines and false belief understanding, since cultural norms need some time to influence other developmental aspects.

Can we already formulate hypotheses regarding Samoan children's performance against the background of what we know from previous chapters? Some studies have observed that children who grow up in an environment with more siblings develop theory of mind skills earlier than children who grow up alone (Perner, Ruffman & Leekam, 1994; Jenkins & Astington, 1996). The so-called "sibling-effect" might help Samoan children to develop mental state reasoning at an early age, since they grow up with lots of siblings around.

In a later study, however, Ruffman, Perner, Naito, Parkin, and Clements (1998) found that only older siblings facilitate false belief understanding. Yet since Samoan children have to redirect their attachment to the primary caregivers at an early age towards the community of other siblings, and since caregiving is delegated to younger ones, Samoan infants are in constant interaction with lots of older siblings as well. Lewis, Freeman, Kyriakidou, Maridaki-Kassotaki, and Berridge (1996) reported that not only older siblings, but the general number of other children as well as adults available to a single child positively influences children's false belief understanding. Against the background of what we have heard about Samoan childood, these findings suggest that the social environment of Samoan children might be particularly conducive for an early and fast development of ToM skills.

On the other hand, a growing body of literature suggests that the caregiver's "mind-mindedness" (cf. Meins et al., 2002) might positively influence children's later understanding of mental states as well as their use of mental state terms. For example, Dunn, Brown, and Beardsall (1991) demonstrated 36-month-olds' discourse about feeling states with their mothers and siblings correlated with their ability to recognize emotions at six years of age. There is growing evidence that such early social experiences might also positively influence ToM development. In their influential study, Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Tesla, and Youngblade (1991) were the first to relate family environment to children's ToM abilities. In this study, children had better chances to succeed on ToM tasks if their families had a tendency to discuss feelings and to use causal state language. Moreover, mothers' frequent attempt to control the behaviour of older siblings had a positive influence. Adrián, Clemente, and Villanueva (2007) demonstrated that mothers' use of cognitive verbs when reading picture books to their children correlated with children's later understanding of mental states. Meins et al. (2002) investigated infant-mother pairs and found that mothers' appropriate

mind-related comments in a free-play context with 6-month-old children accounted for 11% of the variance in their composite ToM score assessed at 45 and 48 months. The positive causal influence of mothers' mental state utterances and ToM understanding was further confirmed by Ruffman, Slade, and Crowe (2002). Although I argued that there mere existence of emotion terms in Samoa proves that mental state attributions and hence mental state talk occur in Samoa, the anthropological reports strongly suggest that mental state discourse might play less of a role in Samoa due to the repression of personal impulses in early childhood, the imposition of *aga* over *āmio*, the virtue of self-governance that results in the public presentation of an opaque exterior and the dispreference to speculate about others' mental states. Moreover, dyadic interactions between mother and child become less common as soon as the child is introduced into the community of other siblings and (mainly) cared for by them. From this point of view, we might also expect Samoan children's ToM development to be slightly delayed.

The following studies were conducted in 2008 and 2010. In 2008, I stayed with a Samoan family who lived in a rural village on the island of Savai'i for almost three months. Sharing their lives and being welcomed as a part of their *'āiga* helped me a lot to get acquainted with Samoan culture and paved the way for my broader acceptance from other villagers as well. The first weeks gave me the chance to rethink my experiments, to discuss translations with locals, to get in contact with schools and potential assistants and to organize everything that was necessary before running the experiments. The first Cup-task study with the first translation was done in these months. In 2010, I went back to Samoa for two months in order to run the same task with a slightly different translation and a smaller sample (cf. Mayer & Träuble, in press). Furthermore, children were tested with the "Bring-me!"-task in several villages on Savai'i.

### *6.2.1 Study 1: The "Cup-task"*

#### *6.2.1.1 Participants*

A total of 302 children between three and 14 years of age participated in the course of ten weeks. The results of 14 children were excluded, mainly because their birthdates were not written down in the teachers' documents or because of procedural errors by the experimenters during the first trials (11 children). Three children were excluded from further analysis because they met predefined exclusion criteria. The final statistical analysis was done with

288 children (146 girls, 142 boys), with 186 children being tested on Savai'i and 102 children on Upolu.

*6.2.1.2 Task*

A variation of Callaghan et al.'s (2005) false belief task was used in this study. In the original task, one of two experimenters hid a trinket under one of three bowls and left the room. A second experimenter suggested to play a trick on Experimenter 1 and hide the trinket under another bowl. After changing the trinket's location, the child was asked where Experimenter 1 would look for the toy when coming back. Children indicated their choice by pointing and were scored having passed the task if they pointed to the location where the trinket was hidden at first and as having failed if they pointed to the location where the trinket was moved while Experimenter 1 was absent.

The differences between the task just described and the one applied in the present work are relatively small. In the present study, a wooden toy that looked like an insect and three white cups instead of bowls were used. The main difference to the task used by Callaghan and colleagues is that children in the present study had to think about the false-belief of another child. Instead of thinking about where the adult experimenter would look for the hidden object, the child had to think about where another child of more or less the same age and out of the same class would look for it. There are some reasons for this variation. First of all, the child does not have to think about the mind of an adult or a stranger. The participating pairs of children knew each other before and had experiences with each other's minds, as it were. I thought that it should be easier for a child to play a trick on a classmate than on a foreigner. Additionally, children are probably less afraid during the testing procedure if they enter the room in pairs than alone. Moreover, children recognize that adults normally have more knowledge than they do (Siegal, 1993). Children might suspect that the experimenter knows about the procedure of the task. If the foreign scientist takes over the role of Experimenter 1, there is some chance that the child does not consider the implications of his absence during the change of location when answering the question by pointing – after all, it is the foreigner himself who came up with that game and therefore children might assume that he will probably know about the whole procedure. Even if such an inference is rather difficult, the procedure chosen in the present work is more resistant towards this alternative explanation which theoretically poses a problem to false belief tasks which involve the deception of an experimenter.

Samoans out of the villages in which the research was done were recruited as experimenters.

*6.2.1.3 Procedure*

Children entered the room in pairs and were welcomed by the experimenter (the Samoan research assistant) and myself. In these tasks, I stayed in the room in order to supervise the experimental procedure, to record the trials on viedo and to score children's pointing responses. However, I remained in the background while the Samoan assistants ran the experiment. Both children were asked to sit down on chairs opposite to the experimenter in front of a table. On the table there were three white cups and a wooden toy-insect with a suction cup which looked like a grasshopper and attracted children's attention because it jumped into the air when being pushed down on the table. Samoans referred to this toy as *loi*, which actually means "ant". The experimenter began the procedure by asking Child 1 to hide the ant under one of the three white cups. If she did not react after repeatedly being asked to do so, the experimenter hid it and said "Look, I put it under here!" Then Child 1 was sent out of the room and it was made sure that she could not look inside. Child 2 stayed with the experimenter and was asked under which of the cups the toy is. This control question assured that Child 2 had seen Child 1 hiding the toy. Then the experimenter suggested to play a trick on Child 1 and to hide the ant under another cup. Children's names were noted as soon as they entered the room and were used by the experimenter throughout the procedure. The false-belief question was given to Child 2 after the new hiding process and after the cups had been put in line again. Child 2 was asked under which of the cups Child 1 would look for the ant when coming back into the room. Child 2 indicated his or her choice by pointing. If there was no reaction, the question was repeated and finally emphasized by the experimenter's pointing to all three cups while asking with constant emphasis "Under this one, under this one, under this one?" After that, Child 2 was given a reward (sweets or balloons) and sent back into the classroom. The wooden toy was put in front of the cups again. Child 1 came back into the room and a new child, Child 3 entered the room. Child 1 was not told about the new location of the reward and that a trick was played on him or her. In so doing, the procedure could be repeated, but this time it was Child 3 who hid the toy and Child 1 who was asked where Child 3 would look for the toy after the change of location. In this way, every child was first in the role of the hider and after that in the role of the trick-player. The following instructions were given to all children in Samoan (see Appendix A for the original translation):

To Child 1:

1) "Put the toy under one of the cups."

2) "Please go outside and wait there."

To Child 2:

1) “Where is the toy?”

2) “Let’s play a trick on (NAME OF CHILD 1). Hide the toy under another cup.”

3) “Where will (NAME OF CHILD 1) look for the toy when (s)he comes back?”

The translation of the sentences into Samoan language was discussed with Samoans. The instructions contain no mental verbs like “think” or “believe”. Instead, children were simply asked where the other child would look for the toy. The Samoan verb for the English term “to look for” is *su‘e* (Milner, 1993). It is the word that was also used in the instructions of the study by Callaghan and colleagues (2005) (personal communication). I will come back to this in a short while.

After being questioned where the other child would look for the toy, children indicated their choice by pointing or touching. If it was not clear to which cup children were pointing, they were asked to actually touch the cup. Figure 6 shows a typical experimental setting.

**Figure 6: Setting of the Cup-task in a school on Savai’i**

*6.2.1.4 Scoring*

A child was scored as having passed the task if he or she pointed at the cup under which the other child who was sent out of the room had hidden the toy and as having failed if he or she pointed at the cup where the toy was moved meanwhile or the third cup that wasn’t involved in the hiding process at all. All testing sessions were recorded on video. There was perfect agreement between the Samoan experimenters and the supervisor on children’s pointing.

*6.2.1.5 Analysis*

The data were analyzed using binary logistic regression analyses with performance on the false-belief tasks as the dependent variable, taking the values of 0 and 1. The model included age and regional provenance (Savai'i or Upolu) as predictors and Wald statistics were calculated. Regional provenance might be a predictor as many children tested on Upolu had a less traditional and more Western background.

In a second step, the different age groups were compared with each other using chi-square tests in order to see whether there is a conceptual change in performance among Samoan children as reported for children in Western societies, where this change usually occurs between 3 and 5 years of age. Moreover, binomial tests were calculated in order to see whether children within each age class replied above chance. Due to small sample sizes in the group of the 13- ($n$=3) and 14-year-olds ($n$=1), the 12-, 13-, and 14-year-old children constituted one common age-group.

*6.2.1.6 Results and discussion*

The binary logistic regression demonstrated that age (classified in years) was a predictor for false-belief understanding (Wald=10.58, $p$<.01). The analysis also revealed that with increasing age the odds of the outcome to pass the false-belief task increase with the odds ratio = 1.2. The probability that a 7-year-old child passes the task is hence 20% higher as compared to a 6-year-old child. Therefore, the probability to pass the false-belief task does increase with age, but rather slowly and gradually. Regional provenance was not a significant predictor for children's false-belief performance.

As shown in Table 1, there is no relevant improvement in false-belief performance between three and five years of age. 5-year-olds did not perform better than the younger children and there was no succeeding majority before 8 years of age, where 55.2% of the children succeeded. As shown in Table 1, only children from 8 years of age onwards significantly replied above chance level. However, the fact that there is a majority of children passing the task with 8 years of age is not enough to speak of a conceptual change, as children improve only gradually. Moreover, the difference in performance between the 7- and 8-year-olds did not reach significance.

**Table 1**

**Number of Children who Failed and Succeeded (Study 1)**

| | Age-groups (years) | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 3 *n*=8 | 4 *n*=13 | 5 *n*=35 | 6 *n*=33 | 7 *n*=53 | 8 *n*=58 | 9 *n*=32 | 10 *n*=20 | 11 *n*=17 | 12-14 *n*=19 |
| Fail | 5 | 10 | 24 | 17 | 30 | 26 | 15 | 9 | 7 | 6 |
| Pass | 3 | 3 | 11 | 16 | 23 | 32 | 17 | 11 | 10 | 13 |
| % pass | 37.5 | 23.1 | 31.4 | 48.5 | 43.4 | 55.2 | 53.1 | 55.0 | 58.8 | 68.4 |
| Sign.* | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. | $p<.001$ | $p<.05$ | $p<.05$ | $p<.05$ | $p<.05$ |

*Note*. * Significance-information resulting from the binomial tests that were run in order to see whether children's replies significantly differed from chance level.

For further analysis, the whole sample was split in two halves, the cut-off point lying within the group of the 8-year-olds. Regarding the performance of all children being 8 years or older ($n$=144, age in days ranging from 2931 to 5205 days), 62 children (43.1%) failed and 82 (56.9%) passed the false-belief task. In contrast, among the children below the age of 8 ($n$=144, age in days ranging from 1168 to 2930 days) only 57 children (39.6%) succeeded on the false-belief question whereas 87 children (60.4%) failed ($\chi 2=8.691$, df=1, $p< .01$)
The developmental trajectory and Samoan children's improvement is different from what would be expected in Western samples. Even among the older children (8 years and older), where one would expect almost all children to pass the false-belief task, more than 40% still failed. Referring to the results shown in Table 1, it has to be stated that Samoan children seem to improve gradually and slowly and there is no threshold to support the idea of a conceptual change at a certain age.

### *6.2.2 Study 2: The "Cup-task" II*

In Study 2 I tested whether similar results would be obtained when using a different and potentially easier translation within the same task. When asking children the control question "Where is the ant?" children sometimes pointed to one of the cups in a very hasty and indefinite manner. The Samoan experimenter then encouraged them to touch the cup. This was important, since knowing where the first child hid the toy is a necessary prerequisite for giving a correct answer to the crucial false belief question. However, some Samoan experimenter sometimes encourage the child by saying "*Su'e!*" as a prompt. This might point to another use of the term. In this context, the prompt could also be translated as "Look for it!" – however, how the prompt was given and how quickly children followed this order by lifting the cup made me suspicious. It seemed to me that *su'e* in this imperative form could

mean something like “Go and find it!”, or “Get it!”. I wondered whether this term might be understood ambiguously in the crucial false belief question. What if children understood the translation of the Samoan sentence *O fea lā e sau nei X su‘e ai le loi?* not as “Where will X look for the ant when he/she comes back?”, but rather as “Where will X *find or get* the ant when he/she comes back?”? I asked some Samoans how they would translate the word *su‘e*, which, according to Milner (1993), translates as “to look for, try to find”. Some Samoans said that they would translate it as “to find”, however. Note, that this would completely change the meaning of the crucial question, since the location where the ant can be found is precisely *not* where a child holding a false belief will look for it at first. The word *su’e*, however, was also used in the study done by Callaghan and colleagues (2005) who reported a significant difference between the 3- and 5-year-olds. Their crucial question *O fea o le a alu i ai Sina e su‘e ai lana meataalo pea foi mai?* translates as “Where is Sina going to look for her toy when she comes back?”.

In order to make the task as easy as possible for children and in order to avoid the potential difficulties of the term *su’e*, we wanted to replace it by a less ambiguous word and used the Samoan verb for “to touch”, *tago*. Moreover, the Samoan word *muamua* (first) was added as previous research reported that the use of the word “first” in false belief tasks helps children to perform better (Siegal & Beattie, 1991).

*6.2.2.1 Participants*

A total of 55 children between 4 and 8 years of age participated in the course of one month. The statistical analysis was done with all 55 children (29 girls, 26 boys).

*6.2.2.2 Procedure*

The procedure is similar to the one applied in Study 1. The instructions were again given to all children in Samoan. Instructions were exactly like in Study 1, with a slight translational difference at the end of the procedure. The final question to the tested child was no longer where the other child would look for the toy when coming back – instead, children where asked which cup would be touched first by the other child:

“When (Name OF CHILD 1) comes back, where is the cup (s)he will first touch?”

*6.2.2.3 Scoring*

Children were scored in the same way as in Study 1.

*6.2.2.4 Analysis*

The data were again analyzed using binary logistic regression analyses with performance on the false-belief tasks as the dependent variable, taking the values of 0 and 1. The model included age as predictor and the Wald statistic was calculated.
In a second step, the different age groups were again compared with each other using chi-square and binomial tests. For all analyses, the one 8-year-old child was assigned to the group of the 7-year-olds.

*6.2.2.5 Results and discussion*

The binary logistic regression demonstrated that this time, age was not a significant predictor for false-belief understanding (Wald=3.00, $p$=.083). As shown in Table 2, there is improvement in performance with age. However, it did not become significant. As shown in Table 2, children between 4 and 8 years of age do not reply above chance level. This is in line with the results of Study 1, where children began to reply above chance level not before 8 years of age.

**Table 2**

**Number of Children who Failed and Succeeded (Study 2)**

| | 4<br>$n$=7 | 5<br>$n$=7 | 6<br>$n$=21 | 7-8<br>$n$=20 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fail | 6 | 5 | 14 | 10 |
| Pass | 1 | 2 | 7 | 10 |
| % pass | 14.3 | 28.6 | 33.3 | 50.0 |
| Sign.* | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. | n.s. |

*Note*. * Significance-information resulting from the binomial tests that were run in order to see whether children's replies significantly differed from chance level.

What appears not to be in line with the results of Study 1, however, is the non-significant result of the binary logistic regression. In order to have a closer look at this difference, another binary logistic was calculated with the sample of Study 1, but this time, only the 3- to 7-year-old children were included ($n$=142). In this way, both samples within this age range could be compared with respect to the question whether age is a significant predictor for false belief performance between 3 and 7 years of age in Samoa. Within this age range, however, age did not significantly predict children's performance (Wald=1.87, $p$=.171) in Study 1.

What if there was an ambiguous term or shortcoming in the translation used in Study 2? One might object that the used question ("When (Name OF CHILD 1) comes back, where is the cup (s)he will first touch?") does not make clear that we assume it to be the purpose of the child to find the ant under one of the cups. In Study 1, the crucial question involved the information that the child is going to look for the toy when coming back. Note, however, that it is difficult to provide this piece of information in Samoan without using the term *su'e*. There are, however, two arguments that speak for the appropriateness of the present translation. First, let us start with the fact that from 55 children who participated in the second study, 35 gave a wrong answer to the false belief question. Since there are three cups involved, there are two possible wrong answers. Children can either point to the cup where the toy actually is or to the third cup that was not involved in the hiding process at all. If children who give the wrong answer respond on the basis of reality by pointing to the cup where the toy actually is, this would at least support that children understood "where is the cup (s)he will first touch" in the correct way, namely, as being part of the attempt to get the ant again. One child's response was not recorded, so that we can analyze the wrong pointing responses of $n$=34 children. From these 34 children, 29 pointed to the cup where the toy actually is, while only 5 children pointed to the third cup that was not involved in the experimental procedure at all (binomial test, $p<.000$).
The second argument that speaks for the appropriateness of the present task comes from a small control study with German children ($n$=19) between 4 and 6 years of age who administered the same task with the similar instruction. One boy had to be excluded because of confusion. The final sample consisted of 18 children, fairly even split between girls (8) and boys (10), with five 4-year-olds, twelve 5-year-olds, and one 6-year-old child. The youngest child was 49 months old, the oldest one 80 months. Average age was 59,94 months, i.e., 5 years (range 31 months, $\sigma$=6,90). From these 18 children, only one 5-year-old boy gave the wrong answer and pointed to the cup where the toy actually was.

#### *6.2.2.6 Summary of the "Cup-tasks"*

Although I applied a strikingly similar task with two different translations to a large sample of Samoan children, it was not possible to replicate the results of Callaghan et al. (2005). As reported by Mayer and Träuble (in press), the present results suggest a slower and gradual development of false belief understanding among Samoan children, with no clear majority passing the task before 8 years of age. Since I used two different translations and a much broader sample, the present results appear to be more convincing than the results obtained by

Callaghan et al. Moreover, the difference between the 3- and 5-year-olds in their study was only significant at $p<.10$, which gives rise to the question whether their result actually stands in stark contrast to the present one at all.

Note, that I have mentioned another difference between the present studies and the one applied by Callaghan et al. While children in their study had to think about under which location an *adult* would look, children in the present study had to think about under which cup *another child* would look. I have argued above that the present version might have some advantages. Still, I cannot rule out that this difference might account for the different results. I have already mentioned that cross-cultural psychologists do usually not adapt the *interactions* involved in an experimental procedure to local expectations and culturally appropriate forms of adult-child interaction. In Western experimental settings, children are usually involved in friendly interactions, in playful settings, and they are kindly asked by adult experiments to answer a question, to help, or to do something. In Samoa, in contrast, adults would not kindly ask children for help. Rather, they would give short commands. We have heard in the chapter on Samoa that intentions might be important to Samoans if they have to grasp the meaning of something a higher-ranking person has said or done. Note, that children in Callaghan et al.'s study must grasp what an *adult* intends to get. Although I have provided some reasons against experimental setups that involve the deception of an experimenter, this might also have facilitated children's performance in the study of Callaghan and colleagues. Ochs says:

> when a higher-ranking person orders a lower-ranking person to carry out some action, the personal intentions of the speaker are also of primary importance. The lower-ranking party cannot assign his own interpretation but rather must grasp that intended by the higher-ranking speaker. (1988, p. 142)

With this in mind, it might be reasonable to design a false belief task in which orders are given by a higher-ranking person to a lower-ranking one. Since adults are always of higher-rank in Samoa than children, a paradigm based on commands might be especially suited for the Samoan context. What if the adult is a foreigner? Ochs and Schieffelin say:

> Foreigners typically (and historically) are persons to whom respect is appropriate – strangers or guests of relatively high status. The appropriate comportment toward such persons is one of accommodation to their needs, communicative needs being basic. (1994, pp. 495-496)

The next study is based on commands which are given by myself to children. In the false belief condition, I am involved in a situation where children must consider the intention lying behind my command in the light of my false belief in order to provide the appropriate help. In a sense, the following task tries to operationalize and use Ochs' observation that lower-ranking Samoans must grasp the intention of higher-ranking ones when following orders.

#### ***6.2.3 Study 3: The "Bring-me!"-task***

##### *6.2.3.1 Participants*

A total of 61 Samoan children between five and eight years of age participated in the course of four weeks. None of them met any of the predefined exclusion criteria. Therefore, the final statistical analysis of the Samoan sample was done with 61 children, tolerably even split between boys (28) and girls (33). Children were randomly assigned either to a true belief condition ($n$=31) or to a false belief condition ($n$=30).

For the cross-cultural comparison, a German sample, consisting of 41 children between 5 and 7 years of age, was tested. One girl had to be excluded because of ambivalent response behaviour. The final statistical analysis was done with 40 children, tolerably even split between girls (23) and boys (17). The youngest child was 67 months old, the oldest one 84 months. Average age was 6;3 years (range 17 months, $\sigma$=5,40). Children were randomly assigned either to a true belief condition ($n$=20) or to a false belief condition ($n$=20).

For reasons of comparison, the Samoan sample was reduced in order to match it as accurately as possible to the German sample. In the analysis of the cross-cultural comparison, the Samoan sample consisted of $n$=40 children between 69 and 86 months. Average age was 6;6 months (range = 17 months, $\sigma$=5,34). 19 children were randomly assigned to the true belief condition, 21 to the false belief condition.

##### *6.2.3.2 Materials*

Two small grey cardboard boxes, suited for pencils, were put on a table in approximately 30 cm distance from each other. Both could be opened and closed from two sides. A black pencil was put in one of the boxes and a red pencil into the other one (see Figure 7). E1 was sitting behind the table with a notepad in his hands, while E2 was standing besides, observing the whole scene.

**Figure 7: Setting of the Bring-me!-task in a classroom on Savai'i**

*6.2.3.3 Procedure*

The child sat in front of E1 at a table. On the table, there were two grey identical boxes, one containing a red, the other one a black pencil. E1 requested repeatedly one of the two pencils by pointing and saying "Give me the pencil in this box". During the familiarization phase, four commands were given to each child. In order to control for order effects, E1 first pointed to the Box in either location A or B, then to the other location, again to the same location and finally to the location he pointed at first (ABBA or BAAB). In this way, a single child could not stick to the rule that E1 always wants the pencils in turn. In the false belief condition, E1 left the room after the last command of the familiarization phase. E2 then sat down and suggested to play a trick on E1 and to switch pencils. After that, E1 came back, pointed to one of the two boxes and said that he wanted to write another word with the colour inside this (pointing gesture) box. He asked the child to bring it outside in a moment and left the room again. Then, E2 asked the child which pencil E1 actually wanted. The child was considered as taking E1's prior intention into account if he pointed to the non-referred box. Finally, E1 re-entered the room for the second time and repeated that he wanted to write another word with the colour inside this (pointing gesture) box. E1 then remained standing in front of the table and said "Give it to me". Here, too, the child was considered as taking E1's prior intention into account if he gave E1 the pencil out of the non-referred box. In the true belief condition, the only difference to the false belief condition was that E1 witnessed E2 switching the pencils without suggesting to play a trick. The child was considered as taking E1's prior intention into account if he pointed to the referred box when being asked by E2 and if he subsequently gave E1 the pencil out of the referred box.

In this way, every child had to give two behavioural responses. First, each child had to point in response to the question of E2 about which pencil E1 wants (E1 being absent). Second, they had to give one of the two pencils in response to E1's direct request. In this way, children had the opportunity to reveal their knowledge and understanding of the task by pointing while E1 was absent, as E1's direct command might have been too strong. By requiring each child to give two behavioural responses, both possibilities could be checked and torn apart.
The instructions were given to all children in their mother tongue, i.e. Samoan or German (see Appendix A for the full instructions in English and Samoan).

*6.2.3.4 Scoring*

In the false belief condition, children were scored as taking E1's intention and false belief into account when they told E2 (either verbally or by pointing) that E1 actually desired the pencil that is now in the box E1 was not pointing at. Children were furthermore scored as using this ability in the face of E1's direct request when they gave E1 the pencil out of the box E1 was not pointing at.
In the true belief condition, children were scored as taking E1`s intention and true belief into account when they told E2 (verbally or by pointing) that E1 desired the pencil out of the box E1 was pointing at. Children were furthermore scored as using this ability in the face of E1's direct request when they gave E1 the pencil out of the box E1 was pointing at.
E2 made notes to record children's choices. All trials were recorded on video so that E2's notes could later be double-checked for reliability. Perfect agreement was achieved.

*6.2.3.5 Analysis*

The data were analysed using cross-tables, calculating binomial and chi-square tests. In a first step, the full Samoan sample was analysed using binomial tests within both experimental conditions. In a second step, the Samoan sample was reduced and age-matched to the German sample. Although this matching was done afterwards, it was still random in the sense that the original Samoan sample was simply curtailed with respect to its age range, leaving out the children much younger than the youngest German child and leaving out the majority of those older than the oldest German child. This was done without any regard to the experimental condition or performance of the children left out. For reasons of comparison, the original Samoan sample was reduced to 40 children so that perfect comparability to the German sample ($n$=40) was given.

As several authors in the field of cross-cultural research reported a delay in the onset of false belief for certain places, one might argue that curtailing the original Samoan sample by leaving out some of the older children might prevent them from demonstrating their false belief understanding. Including the older children again might show that, although delayed, false belief understanding still develops within the age range of the tested Samoan sample. As another approach to the data, we therefore curtailed the 21 youngest children in Samoa in order to be able to compare the 40 German children to the 40 oldest children in Samoa.

*6.2.3.6 Results*

The experimental procedure required each child to give two behavioural answers, pointing and giving. From all tested children in both samples, only one boy in the German sample gave the right behavioural answer in the false belief condition by giving the pencil out of the non-referred box after E1's direct request. Therefore, this part of the experimental procedure was not further analysed due to a lack of variance in children's giving responses. Nevertheless, this is an interesting result in its own right, since children seem to perceive imperative pointing as such a strong command that they do not interpret it as being guided by a false belief even in cases where they know that the adult actually wants to have another pencil. The following analyses as well as the subsequent discussion refer to children's pointing responses to E2 explicit question only.

I will start with the Samoan sample alone. From the 31 children in the true belief condition, 21 correctly indicated that the experimenter wants the pencil in the box he pointed at, while ten children wrongly indicated that the experimenter wants the pencil in the non-referred box (binomial test, $p$=n.s.). Most of the children in the true belief condition were either six ($n$=12) or seven ($n$=11) years old. Neither the group of the 6-year-olds, nor the group of the 7-year-olds did reply above chance level (binomial tests, $p$=n.s.).

From the 30 children in the false belief condition, six correctly indicated that the experimenter wants the pencil in the box he did not point at, while 24 children wrongly indicated that the experimenter wants the pencil in the referred box (binomial test, $p=.001$). Again, most of the children in the false belief condition were either six ($n$=15) or seven ($n$=12) years old. Both of them significantly replied below chance level (6-year-olds: binomial test, $p<.035$; 7-year-olds: binomial test, $p<.006$), which indicates that they mostly pointed to the referred box (binomial test, $p<.001$).

For the cross-cultural comparison, analyses were done with the German and the age-matched Samoan sample, with 40 children each. The results for both samples are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

**Number of Children who Pointed to the Referred/Non-referred Box, per Condition and Country**

| | True belief condition | | False belief condition | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Points to referred box | Points to non-referred box | Points to referred box | Points to non-referred box |
| German sample ($n$ = 40) | 20 | 0 | 5 | 15 |
| Samoan sample ($n$ = 40) | 13 | 6 | 17 | 4 |

The Samoan sample responded by chance in the true belief condition (binomial test across all age classes, $p$=.167) and – like in the original full sample – significantly below chance level in the false belief condition (binomial test across all age classes, $p$<.05), pointing mainly to the referred box. In the German sample, children responded significantly above chance level both in the true belief condition (binomial test across all age classes, $p$<.001) and in the false belief condition (binomial test across all age classes, $p$<.05), where children pointed much more often to the non-referred box.

As the two samples are comparable with respect to average age, range and standard deviation, chi–square tests were calculated in order to compare false belief performance between the Samoan and the German sample. In Germany, 15 of the 20 children passed the false belief condition while in Samoa only 4 of 21 pointed correctly to the non-referred box (Fisher's exact test, $p$=.001, two-tailed). In the true belief condition, all 20 German children passed while in Samoa, 13 of the 19 children passed (Fisher's exact test, $p$=.008, two-tailed).

Finally, chi–square tests were calculated in order to compare the German sample with 40 oldest Samoan children, curtailing the 21 youngest ones. Thereby, the difference in average age between the Samoan age-matched sample (M=78, 05 months) and the German sample (M=75,6 months) shifted from less than three months to almost nine months, the newly obtained Samoan sample being clearly older now on average (M=84,50 months).

In the true belief condition, six of the 20 Samoan children indicated wrongly that the experimenter wants the pencil in the non-referred box. In the false belief condition, 17 of the 20 children wrongly indicated that the experimenter wants the pencil in the referred box. Again, the difference in true belief performance across cultures was significant (Fisher's exact test, $p$<.05, two-tailed). The same holds true for the difference in false belief performance (Fisher's exact test, $p$<.001, two-tailed). Apparently, including only the oldest children from the original Samoan sample does not change the significant group difference between both samples.

### 6.3 Discussion

While false belief understanding could be relatively easily demonstrated by Oberle (2009) among 5-year-old on Yap island, which is also a locale discussed in the opacity literature, Samoan children improved only slowly and gradually when tested with the Cup-task. There was no succeeding majority before 8 years of age, and even one third of the 10-12 year-olds failed the task in study 1. Still, age significantly predicted children's performance. Study 2 focused on children between 4 and 8 years of age, using a more comprehensible question at the end of the instructions. Nevertheless, study 2 confirmed the findings from the first study, since children within this age range did not reply above chance level.

The present results are not the first ones that speak for cross-cultural variability in the onset of false-belief understanding (Liu et al., 2008; Vinden, 1996). Surprisingly, these results are in stark contrast to the results obtained by Callaghan et al. (2005). Since I used two different translations, it is rather unlikely that the applied translations might account for this difference. The observation that many of the successful children gave the correct answer immediately and with an impish smile on their face seems to rule out the possibility that the instructions were wrongly translated into Samoan or misunderstood. Importantly, study 1 used the same crucial verb (*su'e*) as the study conducted by Callaghan and colleagues, and study 2 even included the potentially helpful word "first" and replaced the verb *su'e* with the verb *tago* (to touch). A control with a smaller German sample proved that this substitution does not change the typical pattern in Western places, where 5-year-old children pass this task. However, the children in Callaghan et al.'s study had to think about another experimenter, while the children in the two present studies had to think about another child. In order to test whether this might explain the difference, I designed another task on the basis of typical adult-child interactions in Samoa which is based on commands that are given by someone of higher rank. Interestingly, Samoan children did not improve when being commanded by a higher-ranking person, although this is precisely when children must grasp another's intention according to Ochs (1988). This makes it unlikely that Samoan children's alleged positive results in Callaghan et al.'s (2005) are due to the fact that children in their task had to take the perspective of another *adult*.

The "Bring-me!"-task, however, was not used in previous studies. Moreover, it is much more complex than the Cup-task. Therefore, it is open to critique and must be discussed in a bit more detail. Let us have a look at the results again. German children applied above chance level in both the true and the false belief condition, indicating that E1 wants the referred box in the true belief condition and mainly indicating that E1 wants the non-referred box in the

false belief condition. The fact that there was a significant difference between both conditions in the German sample suggests that the “Bring me!”-task is a valid false belief task in which both conditions are understood differently as intended by the experimental setup.

In contrast, Samoan children performed below chance level in the false belief condition, chosing mainly the referred box and hence giving a wrong response in the framework of the experimental setup. In the true belief condition, children replied by chance. Surprisingly, children performed better than their Samoan counterparts although the task is based on typical adult-child interactions in Samoa.

The “Bring me!”-task does not require predicting others’ beliefs like in classic false belief tasks, but it requires the consideration of the others’ belief when interpreting the experimenter’s pointing and command. Some researchers argued that this is easier for children than making predictions (Robbins & Mitchell, 1992). The clear difference between both experimental conditions in the German sample is only understandable on the background of children’s assessment of E1’s current belief. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why children in the false belief condition suddenly point to the non-referred box when being asked which pencil E1 wants to have. The study of Southgate and colleagues (2010) is based on the same considerations, with the difference that the experimenter, after coming back to the room with a false belief about the location of a hitherto unnamed novel object, kindly asked for it by calling it “sefo”. The authors reasoned that children who take into account the experimenter’s false belief will understand that the intended referent, i.e. the sefo, must be inside the box the experimenter is not pointing at. Another difference to the study by Southgate and colleagues (2010) is that the present study used colours instead of objects. By swapping pencils of different colour from one box to the other, the “Bring me!”-task is partly an unexpected transfer paradigm and partly a surprise contents paradigm. One might argue that this made the task more difficult, as children might try to remember where which colour is. Moreover, one might argue that this task presupposes that children understand that it is important for E1 to get a pencil of a certain colour and that this might require own experiences with colours and drawings. Notice, however, that children do not need to remember exactly where which colour is (it is sufficient to understand that the box referred to by E1 does not contain the intended pencil, whatever colour it is) in order to correctly pass the task and that the familiarization phase gave them enough time to understand that in this context, colour indeed is important for E1. Finally, the use of colour terms in a false belief task has already been successfully done by Robbins and Mitchell (1992).

One might also doubt whether the instruction "I want to write another word with the colour in this box" is clear enough. What if children understood it with an emphasis on the box, i.e. in the sense of "I want to write with the pen in this box, whatever colour it has"? I cannot absolutely rule out that Samoan children understood the instruction in this way. Yet I think that this interpretation is rather unlikely, since this would mean that children did not understand at all what had to be learned in the familiarization trials, namely, that I want to write a word with a certain colour. Moreover, this interpretation does not fit to the fact that 6 out of 19 children in the true belief condition pointed to the non-referred box. More importantly, such an interpretation does not change the cross-cultural pattern: German children clearly did not understand the instruction in this way, and so the obtained results would still be interesting, since the question would then be why Samoan children understand the instruction with an emphasis on the box and German children with an emphasis on the colour. Such an alternative interpretation amounts to saying that Samoan children understand E1's command as "Bring me outside what I am pointing at" while German children understand it as "Bring me outside what I am intending to point at" – and this would indeed be a very interesting difference.

Another specific feature of the "Bring me!" task is the use of commands. In the studies of Southgate et al. (2010) and Buttelmann et al. (2009), the experimenters requested for help. The command of E1 in the present task to bring the pencil pointed at outside is actually a command to help, so the difference between these studies is a rather small one. Commands, directed at children by adults, are usually used to make the child comply immediately, not to make him or her think the matter over. Commands are, in contrast to requests for help, less open for individual consideration, as we want the other person to obey. Adults in Samoa would not kindly ask children for help. Rather, they would give a command. A conflict does automatically arise, however, when the person giving the command is holding a false belief and if we know about it. This conflict can be solved in two ways. One either can take the command as absolute and neglect the false belief behind it, or one can focus on the false belief of the other and relativize the command by interpreting it as being guided by a false belief. The latter solution would give priority to the intention that led to the command. Overtly, however, this might appear as non-compliance and disobedience in the first moment, as the person giving the command – being unaware of his own false belief - would primarily perceive the child's behaviour as non-compliance. Because non-compliance is heavily sanctioned in Samoa, one might argue that Samoan children might have chosen the first solution and take the command as absolute because they do not dare to question whether the

communicated referent is also the intended referent. Hence, E1's command might be harder to ignore for Samoan children than for German children. If we look solely at the false belief condition, this might indeed explain Samoan children's performance. Notice, however, that this explanation stands in contrast with what is actually going on in the true belief condition, where almost one third of the Samoan children do ignore the referential command. As a matter of fact, more Samoan children answer that E1 wants the pencil in the non-referred box in the true belief condition than in the false belief condition, where this answer would be correct. Remember that children in both cultures did only demonstrate their false belief understanding via pointing when being asked by E2 while E1 was absent. Neither the Samoan nor the German children gave the pencil out of the non-referred box when E1 asked them to give him the pencil for the second time, remaining inside the room and pointing to one of the boxes. Apparently, the direct command in presence of E1 is too strong for children *of both cultures* to resist. Even children that gave the correct pointing response to E2's question which pencil E1 wants did not give the corresponding pencil when E1 stayed in the room and asked for it for the second time. In other words, although they did understand the implications of the task and of E1's false belief, this understanding did not translate into a corresponding behavioural response when it came to giving the pencil to E1. This is interesting, as children in similar studies have no problems doing so when an experimenter asks for help (Buttelmann et al., 2009; Southgate et al., 2010). This might hint to the importance of subtle differences in interaction, namely, whether an experimenter kindly asks for help or commands help. Summing up, it seems unlikely that only Samoan children cannot ignore E1's command.

A more serious objection would be to focus on Samoan children's true belief performance. The fact that 6 out of 19 children pointed to the non-referred box gives rise to the impression that they simply did not understand what they were asked to do. Although German children understood the logic of the task and performed differently in the true and false belief condition, the task could be understood wrongly in culture-specific ways only by Samoans. This would mean that the "Bring-me!"-task, although designed for typical adult-child interactions in Samoa, was still not understood by Samoan children. However, if we interpret children's failure in true belief conditions automatically as evidence for the inappropriateness of a task, then we eliminate any possibility to demonstrate that experimental setups might be inappropriate in different cultural contexts on a more general level. I will come back to this point in the following final discussion of this work.

## 7. Discussion

We have reached at the end of our journey, on which we came across various places in the Southern Pacific and Central America. On this journey, we delved into disciplines like philosophy, cultural anthropology, the interdisciplinary ToM-research and experimental as well as developmental psychology. The opacity of other minds phenomenon indeed is a meeting point for these disciplines and an exciting area of study in which interdisciplinary perspectives are the only adequate ones. In this work, I hoped to clarify the relationship between the opacity of other minds phenomenon, 'mindreading' and empathy. Yet in order to investigate this relationship, it was necessary to get a clearer idea of the discrete parts which make up this relationship. A good deal of this work therefore tried to develop clearer definitions of various 'mindreading'-aspects and empathy. This part contributes to the field of social cognition on a more basic level by suggesting to use a conceptually less equivocal set of terms instead of 'mindreading' and theory of mind and by providing a definition of empathy which is both more narrow and cross-culturally more valid than current definitions are.

In chapter 1, I started out to think about the terms opacity and transparency. I argued that the use of the term opacity of other minds gives rise to the idea that our minds are hidden behind our overt behaviour and bodily expressions which are, in this view, something like an opaque barrier. This chapter functioned like a warning, since it proved that the mere use of the term opacity cannot be neutral and does automatically give credit to the ToM-framework.

Chapter 2 critically summarized this framework and identified the currently more popular 'mindreading'-account as inheriting the core ideas of ToM while giving rise to the illusory impression that something like a telepathic access to others' mental states is possible. In order to develop clearer definitions of the different aspects associated with 'mindreading', a first step was to argue for the distinction between mental state inference and mental state attribution. After doing so, I introduced the phenomenologically inspired direct perception approach to mental states as a critique to certain core assumptions of the 'mindreading' approach. Although some researchers accept the direct perception view on the phenomenological level, they still think that ToM captures what is going on in sub-personal spheres. I tried to argue against this view and suggested that, instead of mistrusting our phenomenal experiences as a result of influential cognitivist theories, we should rather do it the other way round: the phenomenologically given should inspire our theories. The notion of contextreading provided an alternative account which can explain how we predict and explain other people's behaviour without recourse to their mental states. Finally, I talked about mental

state inference and related the idea of inference to the experimental laboratory setting which is inspired by the logic of the natural sciences, arguing that this gives rise to an illusion of certainty. I introduced the term mindguessing as phenomenologically more adequate. This chapter temporarily led away from the opacity phenomenon, but it developed the necessary conceptual tools that allowed to detect the defined different aspects in various locales around the globe.

Chapter 3 presented some definitions of empathy as well as Batson's (2009) list of common current usages of it. On this basis, I developed a definition of empathy which emphasized the sharing of the 'how'-aspect of another's experience. Moreover, I suggested that empathy is primarily a compassionate response towards real (i.e., non-fictional), present others. Like in chapter 2, the opacity of other minds phenomenon remained unmentioned in this chapter in order to first develop a preliminary definition of empathy on a theoretical level.

In chapter 4, different opacity reports from Melanesia, Polynesia and Central America were summarized and analysed with respect to whether they suggest a weak or a strong opacity reading, whether aspects of the 'mindguessing'-tool kit developed in chapter 2 do occur (and if so, which) and what they tell us about empathy. While opacity claims are quite common in these locales, none of the anthropologists actually endorses a strong opacity interpretation. Various aspects like mental state attribution, mental state talk, mental state inference and mindguessing are present in these reports – however, they do not tell us anything about false belief understanding. This is not surprising, since false belief understanding is paradigmatically represented in the experimental setting of a false belief task and difficult to prove by observation of everyday life situations. Importantly, the anthropological reports add new ideas to the common usages of empathy discussed in chapter 3. They open up new perspectives and suggest to extend Batson's list with LCCP, empathic attunement, bodily empathy, projective processes and projective empathy, and finally, empathy as redirected attachment. Moreover, some reports (for example from Yap and Central America) suggest that people in these places do not only verbally assert opacity, they publicly present an "opaque exterior" (Throop, 2008, p. 415) and control their expressiveness. In a certain sense, they thus assert the opacity of other minds on a non-verbal level as well. The definition of empathy developed in chapter 3 was then adapted to account for these new aspects and insights.

In chapter 5, I focused on Samoa in order to narrow down the opacity of other minds phenomenon in one specific locale. After providing exhaustive information on Samoan culture, childhood and socialization practices, it was possible to again prove all aspects of the

conceptual ‘mindreading’-tool kit except (except false belief understanding) by a closer look at the different anthropological contributions from Samoa. Samoans, too, present an opaque exterior and endorse a virtue of self-governance concerning the expression of emotions. Opacity claims were repeatedly reported from Samoa. In contextualizing these claims, it became evident that they should not be interpreted in a strong sense. Mageo’s account that empathy in Samoa is redirected attachment and primarily enacted (*alofa*) allowed us to again adapt the definition of empathy. At best, this definition is now culture-fair enough to include a variety of emic concepts which are at least closely related to our notion of empathy. I arrived at this definition in a spiral-shaped process, where emic concepts of empathy from our own culture were used as “imposed etics” in order to derive emic concepts from other places. These were then incorporated into the prior definition in order to arrive at an emically enriched definition which can again be etically imposed to a new place. Finally, the focus on Samoa made it easier to answer what opacity in one specific locale actually is. In Samoa, the opacity of other minds phenomenon is composed of four different but interrelated aspects: 1) opacity as a dispreference to speculate about others’ mental states especially if they are lower-ranking, 2) opacity as a defense strategy to reduce one’s accountability, 3) opacity as a reflection of Samoans’ focus on *aga* instead of *āmio* which makes the assessment of others’ mental states less necessary for everyday interactions to function, 4) opacity as a consequence of the necessity to repress personal impulses in order to focus on others and group demands. These four aspects are different facets of a strong group-orientation and cultural emphasis on relatedness. They give rise to opacity and to the demonstration of an opaque exterior, whilst Samoans still engage in mindguessing, mental state talk, and so forth.

At the end of the theoretical part of this work, it appeared as if Robbins and Rumsey’s (2008) claim that opacity doctrines ought to force a rethinking of fairly settled approaches like ToM and empathy can be easily rejected. Moreover, the introductory chapters of the empirical part of this work refer to a study by Callaghan and colleagues (2005) which demonstrated false belief understanding among 5-year-old children in Samoa and supports the idea that the onset of this ability is universal across cultures. More importantly for the purpose of the present work, however, is the fact that this result seems to supply the last missing piece which is necessary for a full rejection of the idea that opacity doctrines might force a rethinking of ToM. I have already proven many other aspects of ‘mindreading’ in Samoa by a mere look at the literature. Callaghan et al.’s (2005) positive false belief result speaks against the idea that opacity doctrines might influence ToM. However, things turned out to be more complicated. The false belief studies presented in the empirical part of this work are in stark contrast to

Callaghan et al.'s results and might again nourish the idea that there is an influence of opacity doctrines on ToM. I think that there are three main routes one can follow in order to make sense of the theoretical knowledge on Samoa on the one hand and the reported results on the other. First, one can doubt the appropriateness of the applied experiments, the quality of their execution, one can question the translations and argue that the tasks were not adequately adapted. A second possibility is to believe in the false belief results presented in this work and to think about how opacity doctrines might influence ToM development although other aspects associated with 'mindreading' (e.g. mindguessing, mental state attributions, etc.) are present in Samoa as well. Third, we can try to think about whether experimental tasks, no matter how culture-fair and well-adapted they are, might be inappropriate in non-Western places on a more general level. In other words, we can think of experimental work with children as a *Western practice* which is more difficult in places where children are not used to it and its culturally specific precursors.

Let us follow the first route for a moment. In the previous chapter, I have already discussed the problematic aspects of my empirical research. For future research, it would be interesting to replicate Callaghan et al.'s study using two adults like in the original study and the translations applied in the present work. This would help to clarify whether the difference between my own results and the ones obtained by Callaghan and colleagues are due to translational issues or the slight variation (two kids and one experimenter vs. one kid and two experimenters) which I actually considered to be an improvement for reasons already discussed. However, there are a lot of studies that report cross-cultural variation in the onset of false belief understanding. I have critically analyzed the results for Samoa in Callaghan et al.'s study and I do not think that they are very convincing for making the claim that the onset of false belief understanding universally occurs across cultures between four and five years of age. I do not think that the tasks applied in the present work are less appropriate than other tasks applied so far in cross-cultural research for various reasons. First, all translations were thoroughly discussed with several Samoans. Second, if we take serious Ochs' (1988) observation that lower-ranking Samoans must sometimes grasp the intention of a higher-ranking person when receiving an order, then the "Bring-me!"-task should be especially well-suited for Samoa. Third, control studies in Germany suggest that these tasks generally can be understood and passed by children at a comparable age. Even the "Bring-me!"-task was passed by German children, although they are not as used as Samoan children to receive commands in such a straightforward way. Fourth, the first study which used the Cup-task revealed a gradual improvement in false belief understanding with age and is therefore suited

for mapping children's growing understanding. The fact that many children gave the correct answer and quickly responded with an impish smile supports my argument that this task can be understood by Samoan children. Importantly, Samoan children *do* gradually develop false belief understanding in the course of development – at least if we take the results of Study 1 at face value. This is important, since it proves the universal development of this capacity.

The second possibility to make sense of the present results against the background of opacity in Samoa is to think about via which pathways it might influence children's development of false belief understanding. In the previous chapter, I have argued that one would either expect the number of siblings in Samoa to influence children's false belief understanding in a positive direction, or the probable de-emphasis of mental state talk to negatively influence it. The results discussed in the previous chapter are more in line with the latter expectation. Yet, I am not sure whether this gives us the whole story. Wu and Keysar (2007) compared mental perspective taking between Chinese and American adults. They argue that culture could affect perspective taking in two opposing ways and use the "representational hypothesis" and the "attentional hypothesis" to refer to these two possibilities (ibid., p. 601). According to the first, people in interdependent cultures may be "more likely to confound their own perspective with that of the other than are members of a Western, independent-selves culture" (ibid.). In this view, Chinese would be worse perspective takers than Americans. The second hypothesis predicts that Chinese would be better, since interdependence might lead one to focus one's attention on others and therefore away from the self. In this study, the Chinese participants outperformed their American counterparts, which is interpreted by the authors as a strong support for the "attentional hypothesis". Remember that Samoans teach their children from very early on to focus their attention on others (Gerber, 1985; Mageo, 1998; Ochs, 1988; Shore, 1982). According to the attentional hypothesis and against the background of the study by Wu and Keysar, we would expect Samoan adults to perform especially well on adult ToM tasks. Consider another study: Sabbagh and Seamans (2008) examined whether adults' theory of mind skills are transmitted intergenerationally to their children. They investigated parent-child dyads at two points of time: when children were about 3 years old and 6 months later. Sabbagh and Seamans found a significant correlation between parents' and children's theory of mind scores and could predict children's performance on a scaled battery of ToM tasks by their parents' performance on adult ToM tasks. The authors assume that this transmission does also take place via the discussion of mental states in everyday conversations.

Now if theory of mind skills are transmitted from parents to children (Sabbagh & Seamans, 2008), and if adults in more interdependent cultures are expected to perform better on ToM

tasks than those in more independent cultures (Wu & Keysar, 2007), then the question arises why Samoan children perform worse than their counterparts in Germany. Something in this picture most either be wrong or missing. Since the anthropological reports on Samoa confirm that Samoans must learn to direct their attention to others from very early on, there are three possibilities to think of Wu and Keysar's findings and their relationship to what has been said on Samoa. First, the "attentional hypothesis" might be wrong or not be linked to ToM understanding. From this point of view, the results of Wu and Keysar (2007) must be explained differently. Second, the "attentional hypothesis" might be correct and we would expect Samoan adults to perform especially well on ToM tasks. We would then have to make sense of the fact that adults perform well while Samoan children do not, *although already children* have to attend carefully to others (Ochs, 1988). Third, the "attentional hypothesis" might not necessarily be linked to ToM understanding. Although people in Samoa might indeed focus on other people, this orientation might focus on *aga*, i.e., socially appropriate and expected behaviour. It is certainly an interesting question for further research to ask under which conditions a focus on others enhances capacities associated with 'mindreading' and under which conditions it does not. Fourth, other influential factors like opacity doctrines might be stronger and override the positive effect which a focus on others would normally have. Yet we have seen that many other aspects associated with 'mindreading' are present in Samoa: as argued above, Samoans attribute and infer mental states, they engage in mental state talk and mindguessing, and they frankly admitted that they engage in mindguessing when I explicitly asked them. At this point, however, we have to rethink the kind of evidence for these 'mindreading'-practices. Importantly, noticing that all this occurs does not tell us very much about the quality of *how* this occurs. To give an example: if mental state attributions occur both in Culture A and Culture B, this does not tell us very much about the qualitative dimension of these attributions. If people in Culture A say about someone who is mentally ill that he is crazy, that he is of his rocker and that he has lost his marbles, they clearly attribute mental states. However, these kinds of attributions are qualitatively quite different from what people in Culture B might say: that he is suffering from his memories of the bus accident which only he survived, that he is haunted by the question whether he might have helped that woman who still moved her head for a while, that he feels culpable and tries to atone for it by engaging in specific behaviours and so forth. In this work, I did not explore this qualitative dimension. I analysed the anthropological reports and searched for examples of mental state attribution, perspective taking, mindguessing, etc. This was an important first step, since proving that all these practices associated with 'mindreading' occur in a place

where people assert opacity helps us to interpret these claims in a weak sense. However, Samoan caregivers cannot teach their children to demonstrate an opaque exterior and at the same time treat mental states in the same way as people in places where transparent expression is valued (cf. von Poser, 2009). Therefore, I argue that mental state talk, mental state attributions and mindguessing – although all this clearly occurs in Samoa – differ qualitatively from how these practices occur in other places. However, more qualitative research is needed in order to find out whether and how these practices differ qualitatively. Note that various studies mentioned in the previous chapter document the positive influence of caregivers' mental state talk on ToM. Yet how exactly this influence operates on false belief understanding is an open question. Against the background of Samoan socialization, we would expect Samoan mental state talk to be less concerned with what children desire or feel or what might annoy them. Yet consider what false belief understanding is about: it is about knowing that people might falsely believe something to be the case and act on the basis of this believe. It boils down to understanding that someone who has not seen that the cooking pot was moved to the village's fresh water pool will still believe it to be close to the hearth where it usually is. Given all the differences in socialization and folk psychology mentioned above – it is hard to believe, at least in my view, that Samoan children, not to mention adults, should have problems with this kind of understanding. Like in Yap or among the Tzotzil Maya, where opaque exteriors and strategies of concealment give rise to a hightened preoccupation with what really goes on in others, I would expect mindguessing to be even more prominent in Samoa than in places where transparent expression is valued. If we take the present results seriously, however, then we have to make sense of the fact that Samoans might engage more in mindguessing while their children have more problems with another aspect of 'mindreading', namely, false belief understanding. In other words, capacities associated with one and the same term might be differently developed across cultures. In this view, 'mindreading' would not be a single capacity any more in which all aspects of it develop together. It might even be possible that in places where mindguessing is very common due to prevailing strategies of concealment, people might not believe in the possibility of *certain* knowledge – and we have seen in the second chapter that false belief understanding is one of the very rare situations in which (at least the illusion of) certain knowledge is possible. This would be a very interesting and important result of these analyses, since it suggests to think of mindguessing and more certain forms of mental state inference like false belief understanding as separate. Finally, if we take the results at face value and interpret them as a delay in false belief understanding, this strongly relativizes the importance of it. If even 50% of all 8-year-

olds do not pass this task, it cannot be as important for normal social interactions as some authors think (cf. Spaulding, 2010), since 8-year-old Samoans are in many respects much more mature than their Western counterparts: they have learned to control their impulses and feelings, they care for younger siblings, serve higher-ranking people, have their first experiences with English language, are navigating between the Western world as it is represented in formal schooling contexts and Samoan culture in their villages and take over a variety of duties. In a nutshell, if we assume that opacity doctrines might indeed influence Samoan children's false belief understanding, I think that the qualitative dimension of mental state talk and the lack of absence experiences are factors in Samoan children's life that might be influential and worth investigating in future research.

Finally, we can interpret the results and their relationship to what has been said so far on opacity in Samoa as evidence for a more general inappropriateness of experimental setups in non-Western places. In this view, the present results would not necessarily speak for a later acquisition of false belief understanding. Duranti and Ochs (1986) pointed out that Samoan parents do not engage in labelling routines with small children. They do not ask children any questions to which the caregiver already knows the answer. Note that this is precisely what happens in many experimental paradigms. According to Gauvain (1998), such practice is a "mainstay of discourse in school" (ibid., p. 40) in Western countries, but not necessarily in other places. In Western communities, schooling and forms of communication, knowledge acquisition and transmission which are typical for schooling contexts do also influence other aspects of life. That caregivers in these communities ask their children questions to which they already know the answer is a precursor of similar practices in school settings. Yet due to the relative unimportance of personal intention in Samoa and the dispreference for guessing at what is going on in others, "activities such as test questions, riddles, and guessing games of the Twenty Questions and I Spy variety" (Ochs, 1988, p. 143) are rare, since they "all involve explicit guessing at what the speaker has in mind" (ibid.). Vinden was surprised by the fact that Junín Quechua children passed an appearance-reality task (which is considered to require ToM) while failing a change of location task and states: "One might want to argue that there is something in the nature of the tasks themselves that is producing this unusual result" (Vinden, 1996, p. 1714).

Our third route to make sense of the false belief results presented in this work is thus very different from the second one: instead of interpreting Samoan children's difficulties with false belief as evidence for the influence of opacity doctrines, the peculiarity of experimental tasks and their background in practices that are typical for Western communities suggest that they

might themselves be a Western practice. In this view, even the best cultural adaptation of a task would not change the fact that Western children are more used to experiments than for example Samoan children. This might alternatively explain why the only aspect that could not be easily demonstrated to occur in Samoa – false belief understanding – is also the only one which is closely linked to experimental setups. It must be mentioned, however, that a number of hiding games was reported for Samoan children's playing behaviour (Schwartz, 1992), indicating that they are at least familiar with similar contexts than those enacted in the studies of this work. Let us think about the idea to consider experimental tasks as Western practice in a more adventurous way. If children's failure in a true belief condition must be interpreted as a sign that the task was not good or not easily understandable for children in a certain culture – what kind of evidence, then, could show that experimental tasks of this kind are strange for those children *in general*? In concluding that the task was not good enough, we still stick to the belief that an optimally adapted task *can* be designed in principle, that experimental setups *are* universally applicable as long as they are culture-fair. But what if the whole idea of experimental tasks is not culture-fair? Let us follow this line of thought. What would count as supporting evidence for such a claim? Note, that many cross-cultural studies on false belief did not include a true belief condition. To my knowledge, no cross-cultural study on false belief understanding has used a true belief condition at all. Failure in these tasks was interpreted as a false belief delay (Naito & Koyama, 2006) or as a cultural orientation on perceivable actions (Vinden, 1996). Imagine a true belief task had been included in these studies and imagine that about one third of the Japanese children had failed the true belief condition like in the present study. Would this suddenly render these tasks and the published results inadequate? What would this suggest? That my results would be more convincing and clearly speak for a false belief delay of Samoan children if I had not included a true belief condition? Clearly, the present results cannot support or even prove this. Another task might precisely demonstrate that 3-year-old Samoans pass the true and fail the false belief condition, while the 5- and 6-year-olds pass both. Nevertheless, I think it is important for the future of cross-cultural psychology and for an adequate interdisciplinary investigation of phenomena such as the opacity of others minds, to question what we do normally not dare to question: our own research methodologies, especially the logic of experimental studies which is so appealing.

I have exhaustively discussed three possible routes we can follow to make sense of the present false belief results and their relationship to what has been presented in the theoretical part of this work. Summing up, I think that the second and the third routes are the most interesting

and plausible ones. If opacity doctrines should really influence the development of false belief understanding, qualitative aspects of mental state talk in children's environment and their experience with absences should be in the focus of future studies. Moreover, the integration of true belief conditions in false belief tasks of the explicit verbal prediction type (which were hitherto run without true belief conditions), might either confirm the results of existing cross-cultural studies on ToM, or point into a radically new direction which might lead us to rethink whether experimental tasks should really be in the center of cross-cultural psychological research. This leads to a final question: did I use adequate methods for my purpose of clarifying the relationship between opacity, 'mindreading' and empathy? The answer is: Yes, but I did not apply *all* adequate methods. I think that the conceptual part of this work is an important first step for future research on this relationship. In developing a conceptual 'mindreading' tool kit, it was possible to prove different aspects of it by a mere look at the existing anthropological reports. With respect to false belief understanding, I clearly applied the adequate methods, although anthropologists like Duranti (2008) would rather opt for proving this kind of understanding in the field. Yet since the relationship between opacity, 'mindreading' and empathy must be investigated with an interdisciplinary approach, I clearly did not use *all* adequate methodologies. I focused on conceptual work, text analyses and on experimental false belief studies. Conversation analyses, qualitative interviews, classical anthropological fieldwork and joint research programmes where psychologists and anthropologistst cooperate (Funke, 2010) are clearly necessary and would add important information – but this was unfortunately not within the realm of possibilities.

I will finish with what I consider to be most important: Samoa is not anything like the fictional 'opacity island' mentioned in the introductory chapter. On the contrary. Complex forms of interaction and hierarchical principles affect Samoan children's early experience. They have to focus on others and learn to read others in terms of their social role (cf. McGeer, 2007). Mental state inference and –attribution, mental state talk and mindguessing clearly occur in Samoa. Moreover, aspects of empathy like perspective taking and LCCP are common in Samoa. However, the assertion of opacity and the presentation of an opaque exterior seem to complicate dyadic forms of empathy. At the same time, a group-oriented form of empathy makes people to identify with a group and *to enact empathy as alofa* (cf. Von Poser, 2009, forthcoming). Interestingly, opaque exteriors should both enhance mindguessing and make empathy more difficult. I have repeatedly argued that the enactment of social opacity presupposes knowing *what it is* that must be concealed. A similar picture results from other places in the Pacific and in Central America. Robbins and Rumsey (2008) did a good job:

they convincingly introduced cultural anthropology as an interesting discipline which has something to contribute to the ongoing discussion between psychologists, philosophers, and neuroscientists on how we come to understand other minds. They caught our attention by claiming that opacity doctrines ought to force a rethinking of our theories of mind and empathy. Yet they might have claimed a little bit too much. The present work demonstrated that opacity doctrines do not "*fundamentally* contradict social scientific models that assume such knowledge is possible" (Robbins & Rumsey, 2008, p. 408; emphasis added). Nevertheless, the anthropological contributions are important. They should lead us to rethink *the scope* of our theories, since assessing what is in another's mind indeed might be less relevant in places where social roles are more emphasized, for example. Instead of doing away with existing theories and concepts, then, we should broaden them to allow for the inclusion of concepts from other places. Some might fear that the acknowledgment of the importance of culture leads us away from discovering the 'true universal laws' of the human psyche. Yet if we allow for very different forms of empathy and social organization to inform our theories, we still can, somehow paradoxically, arrive at statements that can claim to be universally valid. May I give an example? Here is such a statement: There are no 'opacity islands'.

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## Appendix A – Instructions in English and Samoan

### Cup-task

To Child 1:

1) “Put the toy under one of the cups.”

*Tu‘u le loi i lalo o se ipu.*

2) “Please go outside and wait there.”

*Alu i fafo. Fa‘atali i tua o le faitoto‘a.*

To Child 2:

1) “Where is the toy?”

*O fea le loi?*

2) “Let’s play a trick on (NAME OF CHILD 1). Hide the toy under another cup.”

*Se‘i fa‘ase‘e (NAME OF CHILD 1). Tu‘u le loi i lalo o se isi ipu.*

3) “Where will (NAME OF CHILD 1) look for the toy when (s)he comes back?”

Study 1: *O fea la e sau nei (NAME OF CHILD 1) su‘e ai le loi?*

Study 2: *A toe sau (NAME OF CHILD 1), o fea o ipu e muamua tago ai?*

### Bring-me!-task

True belief condition:

E1: Give me the pencil in this box (pointing). I want to write a word with this colour (holding up the pencil).

*Aumai le penivali o i totonu o le pusa (lea).*

Do you know the name of this colour? (E1 writes some words on his note pad).

*O le a le lanu lea?*

Take the pencil and put it back into the box.

*Tago e tu´u i totonu o le pusa.*

AFTER FAMILIARIZATION:

I am done!

*Ia! O lea ua uma.*

E1 stands up and waits beside the table while E2 takes a seat.

E2: Look, I exchange the pencils. I put the black pencil into this box and the red pencil into that one.

*Va´ai. Ua ou suia lanu. Ou te tu´u le lanu uliuli i le isi pusa a´o le lanu mūmū i le isi pusa.*

E1: I am back in two minutes. (leaves the room)

*Se´i ou te toe sau i se lua minute.*

E2 remains seated, doing nothing, not communicating with the child.

E1 comes back.

E1: I want to write another word with the colour in this box (pointing). Wait a minute and then bring it outside to me.

*Ou te toe fia tusi se upu i le lanu lea o i totonu o le pusa (pointing). Fa´atali mo se minute ona aumai ai lea i fafo iate a´u.*

E1 leaves again.

E2: Which pencil does (NAME OF E1) want? Show it to me. Touch the box.

*O le a le penivali e mana´o iai (NAME OF E1)? Fa´asino mai. Tago le pusa.*

E1 comes back.

E1: I want to write another word with the colour in this box (pointing). Give it to me.

*Ou te toe fia tusi se upu i le lanu lea o i totonu o le pusa (pointing). Aumai.*

<u>False belief condition:</u>

E1: Give me the pencil in this box (pointing). I want to write a word with this colour (holding up the pencil).

*Aumai le penivali o i totonu o le pusa (lea).*

Do you know the name of this colour? (E1 writes some words on his note pad).

*O le a le lanu lea?*

Take the pencil and put it back into the box.

AFTER FAMILIARIZATION:

I am done! I am back in a minute. (leaves the room)

*Ia! O lea ua uma. Se´i ou te toe sau i se lua minute.*

E2 takes a seat.

E2: Look, let's play a trick on (Name OF E1). I exchange the pencils. I put the black pencil into this box and the red pencil into that one. (NAME OF E1) doesn't see this.

*Va´ai. Se´i fa´ase´e Anitele´a. Ua ou suia lanu. Ou te tu´u le lanu uliuli i le isi pusa a´o le lanu mūmū i le isi pusa. E le´o va´ai iai Anitele´a.*

E1 comes back.

E1: I want to write another word with the colour in this box (pointing). Wait a minute and then bring it outside to me.

*Ou te toe fia tusi se upu i le lanu lea o i totonu o le pusa. Fa´atali mo se minute ona aumai ai lea i fafo iate a´u.*

E1 leaves again.

E2: Which pencil does (NAME OF E1) want? Show it to me. Touch the box.

*O le a le penivali e mana´o iai (NAME OF E1)? Fa´asino mai. Tago le pusa.*

E1 comes back.

E1: I want to write another word with the colour in this box (pointing). Give it to me.

*Ou te toe fia tusi se upu i le lanu lea o i totonu o le pusa (pointing). Aumai.*

# Declaration

**Declaration according to § 8 (1) (b) of the Doctoral Degree Regulation of Heidelberg University, Faculty of Behavioural and Cultural Studies.**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this dissertation entitled "Opacity of other minds, empathy and 'mindreading' in Samoa" is my own work, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated or acknowledged by means of complete references.

**Declaration according to § 8 (1) (c) of the Doctoral Degree Regulation of Heidelberg University, Faculty of Behavioural and Cultural Studies**.

Furthermore, I declare that the present dissertation has not been used as an examination paper in this or any derived form and that it was not submitted in any other department.

Last name, first name__________________________

Date, signature_______________________________