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DOING RESEARCH FOR AND WITH OTHERS: A RESEARCHER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH RESEARCH CONTENT

Quivine Ndomo

ABSTRACT

The chapter discusses the question of social justice in social science research by problematizing the researcher-research content relationship and its guiding principle framework Science-Society-Me. With a focus on early career researchers, the author draws on her own PhD research experience to highlight the social justice tension inherent in the normative approaches and methods for selecting research topic, collecting data and relating with research participants, and analyzing and interpreting data especially in empirical research with fellow human beings. Drawing on the theory of affect, the chapter centralizes the position, biography and experience of the researcher, and the relationship between the researcher and the research participants to balance out the privileged (power) position of 'science'.

Keywords: Science-society-me; social justice; reflexivity; compassionate research; inclusive research; power

PROBLEMATISING A RESEARCHER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH RESEARCH CONTENT

Topic, data, and outputs are some of the constituent features of research content (Bhattacharjee, 2012). All three are individually

multifaceted: topic covering research questions and the demographic in focus; data including data collection methods, tools, and techniques; and output including analysis, interpretation, and presentation. This short list delimits the 'research content' this paper discusses with regards to qualitative empirical research, with human beings as research participants in the social sciences.

A number of reasons make research content a fundamental part of a research project (see Reis, 1999). This chapter focuses on two emerging and interconnected reasons, which underlie the need to critically explore and unpack the ways researchers engage with research content, from the standpoint of affect. First reason is that research content, today, is engaged in contexts where technology and innovation such as cloud storage and open access publishing allow for greater, and longer access to recorded information (Laakso et al., 2011). Secondly, widely accessible research content can be appropriated differentially by research interest groups to impact the focus demographic and research participants (Da Silva & Dobránszki, 2015). Both reasons throw into focus questions of justice - inclusion, representation, (power) equity - in research practice. Case in point, where research content misrepresents a participant group, appropriation of such content by policy makers could have long term, potentially adverse effects on the group and similar demographics. Open access data and data sharing, albeit positive developments, incorporate additional risks for misinterpretation, misrepresentation, exclusion etc. The emerging context spotlights a question of justice in research practice which the chapter discusses in detail. Specifically, the chapter discusses the tensions arising from the different interests of different stakeholders in a research project that manifest at three stages of the research process – picking a topic, collecting data, analysing/interpreting data, and how an early career researcher could balance them.

In other words, this chapter explores a researcher's relationship with research content through the lens of justice. How do we decide to be the kind of researcher that we are and doing the type of research we do? How do we pick the topics and questions we investigate, the populations we focus on, and how and with whom do we decide the

kind of impact that our research should have on science, people, and places? Does the process we follow ensure justice for all involved? Literature on researcher-research content relationship outline a brief yet nuanced list of principles, rules, and norms shaping the researcher-research content relationship (see e.g., Kumar, 2011; Saunders et al., 2009; Young, 2019; Parija and Kate, 2018; Jensen, 2013; Donaghey, 2020). In this chapter, I will focus on three central ones - "Science", "Society", and "Me", and the inherent power dynamic. My take on the three draws on literature on the discrete factors but combines them to highlight their function as an interconnected unit.

Researchers inevitably draw on all three when making key research decisions concerning content (Adhikari, 2020; Davis, 2001; Gibbons, 1999; Jensen, 2013). Science covers universally applicable principles, norms, and rules of the world of research such as novelty and guided attempts to push the frontiers of knowledge (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Society underscores the expectations of the 'social contract' between science and society, which fall under the umbrella of importance, relevance, and credibility (Gibbons, 1999). The 'me' element referencing the individual researcher emphasises interest, passion, and tractability of selected research projects (Davis, 2001; Jensen, 2013). What the science-society-me framework captures in a nutshell are the tensions and power balancing acts that researchers negotiate in the process of defining their relationship with research content (Anderson & Louis, 1994; Torika, 2018; Weatherall, 2019). However, there are some problems with the framework. First, it fails to include research participants as a central stakeholder. Secondly, the power balance between the three domains is likely to skew in favour of science, which being the historical domain of research, enjoys primacy in shaping the entire research process; and society that is privileged by the influential capacity of interest groups such as organisations and companies with funding and employer power (Torika, 2018). On the other hand, the individual researcher's interests and passion, though underscored in literature (Davis, 2001; Jensen; 2013), is subjugated to the former two. The science-society-researcher power im/balance throws into sharp relief the complex relationship between researchers and their research

content, especially questions of justice such as inclusion, representation, and equity.

Against this backdrop, the chapter seeks to **investigate three research questions**: How can the interaction between science, society, research participants, and individual researchers be made more equitable and to elevate the voice, perspective, and way of knowing of the latter two? What form of researcher-content relationship can facilitate this? And how can we achieve it? The paper draws on the theoretical concept 'affect', as developed by Massumi (1995, 2002, 2015), Clough and Halley (2007), and Ahmed (2004), in line with Baruch Spinoza's philosophy, as the power to affect and be affected by others, the result of which is social reproduction. Once operationalised as 'affective researching', it is used to challenge and propose an alternative to the predominant science-society-me framework in social science empirical research with human beings. The research questions are discussed through an introspective autoethnography, (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, Boylorn & Orbe, 2013; Minge' & Sterner, 2016; Adams, Ellis, Jones, 2017), based on my own experiences – illuminated through three turning point events and linked epiphanies (Denzin, 1989, 2014; Bochner & Ellis, 1982), from my MA and PhD research experiences. Denzin's turning points are life altering occurrences that drive individuals to assess specific life matters or general life worries such as success (Denzin, 2014). In case a turning point becomes an inflection point out of which a lesson is learnt and change enacted, then they graduate into epiphanies (ibid).

Concretely, I attempt to develop a just approach to engaging research content, drawing on affect to conduct research compassionately, reflexively, for, and with participants, thus doing research as social justice advocacy. In addition to affect as a theoretical tool, I'll employ the methodological concepts of compassionate researching and reflexivity (Ellis, 2011), and local theories of interpretation (Denzin, 1989). The chapter extends two propositions towards one plausible way of engaging research content affectively: 1) adjusting the 'space' of research for a fairer power balance and to be more inclusive; and 2) adjusting researcher-research participant relationships to developed partnerships. The discussion is based on my own research experience,

making me the auto-ethnographer and object of autoethnography (see Ellis et al., 2011, p. 276).

THEORISING AFFECT AND AFFECTIVE RESEARCHING

This research draws on Spinoza's philosophy, through Massumi (1995, 2002, 2015), Clough and Halley (2007), and Ahmed (2004) to operationalise affect as a theoretical tool for exploring one type of relationship that a researcher can have with their research content. My operationalisation stems from the very simplified summation of affect as the power to act, and to be acted upon (Clough, 2007; Massumi, 2013, p.3; Negri, 1999). Massumi reconceptualises **the power to act and be acted upon (affect) as the margin of manoeuvrability, or the realm of possibilities**. The 'what we might be able to do, or where we might be able to go' – in every present situation; thus, potential, and thus power to act (Massumi, 2015, p.3). Our actions are however not completely disconnected from those of others with whom we interact, therefore, Spinoza emphasises that 'affecting' and 'being affected' are not independent occurrences (ibid, p.4). When you act in a way that affects others, you inevitably open yourself up to be influenced in your acting, thus being acted on, initiating a process of social production (Ahmed, 2004).

Affect, therefore, is a transient process that continually changes individuals' capacities to act in one way or another (Ducey, 2007; Massumi, 2015). As such, interactions with other bodies present transition moments over which our capacities to act interact with their capacities to act, acting on each other, resulting in a change in each other. The intensities of changes vary and are felt or experienced variably from occasion to occasion. A concrete example of experienced intensity that everyone can recognise with, and also one that I will use throughout the discussion section (4.0.) is a pair of concepts Denzin (1989, 2014) and Bochner and Ellis (1992) call **'turning points' and 'epiphanies'**. Turning points are occurrences that individuals confront, out of which a life lesson is derived (epiphany) (Denzin, 1989, p.33). The lesson leaves an impression in the individual's life, and often

becomes a reference point for proceeding decision making. Drawing on Massumi, therefore, we can conclude that affect consists of the intensities experienced throughout our lives, whose role is to energize, contradict, deconstruct, and overwhelm the narratives through which we live (Massumi, 2002; White, 2017, p. 177). It is in this sense that affects 'do' things (Ahmed, 2004, p.119).

Transferring this understanding of affect to the practice of research prompts us to think about how we can make research more inclusive and considerate. How can we become affective researchers doing research in a reciprocal interaction of affects with other biographical bodies? In other words, how does one become a researcher whose primary preoccupation is stakeholders' capacity to affect and the interaction of such affections? Therefore, my definition of an affective researcher is grounded by two features of affect as operationalised above. 1) Affect being a process of change or transition in the capacities and potentials of individuals, and 2) the reciprocal relationship between 'bodies' – bodies referring to capacity, or 'what they can do' as they go through life. An affective researcher, therefore, is one who chooses to be 'intensely aware' of their capacities as actors, how they apply these capacities, the contexts in which they exist and interact with others, as well as the capacities/powers of the others with whom they interact, and how others affect their capacities (Gonzalez-Lopez 2011: 448-450; Ellis, 2007; Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). They apply that awareness to their research, to become highly reflexive and holistically immersed researchers. They reflect about their nuanced capacity/power and how that shapes research, as well as how research participants' capacities autonomously shape, want to shape, and can be applied and allowed to shape the research process.

Simplified, **affective researching takes on a reflexive, compassionate, collaborative, and social justice approach.** Reflexivity and compassion mean being considerate of self and others throughout, such that the boundaries between 'life' and 'research' reduce significantly as research becomes a recurrent node in the life process (See Ellis et al., 2011). Two core research design and practical changes become necessary to do affective researching: 1) Relocating the process of research from a perceived or real distinct 'location' in a

'scientific realm' consisting of fixed temporal, spatial, theoretical, and methodological boundaries, to a non-fixed location - the daily processes of life, so that researchers live their research. Similarly, motivation to research will be routinely mediated by constant interaction between researcher and all involved, especially research participants in dialogue. 2) Shifting to long term developed professional partnerships with (selected) research participants to reinforce substantively dialogical interaction in the research process (See e.g., Ellis, 2017; Ellis, 2016; Ellis et al., 2011). In such a relationship, a researcher consciously allows their biography and agency to intervene in their research, while also recognising and honouring the capacity and working of other bodies involved to influence the research e.g., research method choice. Importantly, the new research relationship dynamic shifts the researcher's obligation and commitment to the research participants. Concretely, this manifests in the choice of methods, tools and techniques, and packaging of findings, which will lean to collaborative methods such as ethnography, biographical narratives, and autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis, 2017).

METHOD

The chapter uses an **autoethnographic** research style (Adams, Ellis & Jones, 2017; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Denzin 2014), and **methodological tools and techniques of interpretive autobiography and ethnography** (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Denzin, 1989; Ellis et al., 2011). Therefore, the chapter is a reflexive, retrospective account of my postgraduate research experience over a four-year period (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 276). The principal subject of autobiographical research (biographical inquiry turned on to self) is personal experiences and own stories and narratives of lived experiences. Biographical analyses, thus, focus on key transformative moments in the life course that shape the future, or how the present and the past is interpreted. Denzin called these moments "turning points", and the impact or lessons derived from them "epiphanies" (Denzin, 1989). Ethnographic focus on culture as the phenomenon of

analysis, weaved with a biographical focus on personal experiences, produces autoethnography as a research approach that uses the personal (inner world), to understand the external (outside world) (Ellis, et al., 2011; Merrill & West 2009, p.17). In weaving the external and internal worlds of a researcher, autoethnography allows research to deal with questions of power, justice, social consciousness, and material social action or agency (Adams et al., 2017). Therefore, in this chapter, I write in, my lived experience of researching the lived experiences of migration and integration by highly educated African student migrants in Finland, to engage a larger discourse on research methods and practices, inclusion, and social justice (Denzin, 2014, p.1-7).

The Chapter, however, is predominantly theoretical, and uses a multidimensional theoretical framework consisting of 'affect', 'turning points', and 'epiphanies' as core theoretical tools to unpack discrete practices and approaches I have applied when engaging with my research content, including the science-society-me decision framework. Although there is no empirical data analysed parse, reference is made to the research I have conducted over the 4 years. Additionally, my reflections draw on several documents including records of data analyses stored in a software (QDA Miner Lite), paper field notes, email correspondence, and publication review correspondences (Ellis et al., 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

DISCUSSION

In this section, I discuss my experiences and adaptations when studying the integration of highly educated African migrants in the Finnish labour market, through the lens of affective researching. It is divided into three sub-sections corresponding to the categorisation of research content section 1.0.: 1) topic, 2) data, and 3) output. In each section, an analytical narrative is built around a single 'turning point' and 'epiphany', and each narrative is linked to one or two of my research studies. Three of my research papers are referenced: Ndomo,

2018 (MA thesis); Ndomo, 2020; and Ndomo & Lillie, 2022, *forthcoming*.

PICKING A RESEARCH TOPIC IN THE INTERSECTION OF 'SCIENCE', 'SOCIETY', AND 'ME'

On a chilly October Monday (2016), my first in Finland, I sat at the kitchen table sipping tea as my hosts, Dennis and Kevin got ready for work. As they crisscross the kitchen, to the coffee maker, teabags, bread, I notice and immediately start thinking about their clothing. Dennis, my mate from undergrad school in Kenya, is wearing a luminous green T-shirt with the acronym VMP on it, and jeans bottoms. Kevin's is orange with scanty Finnish writing on it. They have a bunch of keys on a holder that goes around the neck. I wonder silently that they don't look work ready. Where are the Khaki pants and striped shirts, belts, and blazers? I follow them to the door, where they put on these massive shoes, jackets and dash out to catch the bus. As I return to the kitchen, I notice a person sleeping in the living room couch – one foot on the ground, the other on the couch. I think "wont he go to work? Did he oversleep? I interrupt myself as I conclude that work life is probably just different here expectedly, so I put it to rest. That evening I ask Dennis about their dressing. He told me the shoes made all the difference when you were on your feet for 6 hours, cleaning the floors of a bus terminal. I asked him if that was his job – cleaning. As he confirmed, my heart and my mind worried for him and for me. He said Kevin and most people he knew did the same. He also told me about 'POSTI' – night newspaper delivery which he said he didn't like because he prefers to sleep at night, and I connect the dots...
(Vignette 1 – Quivine, Kevin, Dennis, Jeff)

Two months later, influenced by the vignette 1 experience, I picked the labour market integration of highly educated African migrants in Finland as my research topic, making the breakfast experience an epiphanic turning point moment in my research 'life'. A turning point in uncovering a focal reality about the economic integration of a demographic I cared about and belonged to. The vignette is

particularly fitting for this discussion as it captures several features of an affective process of picking a research topic collaboratively with other research stakeholders, especially research participants, and in the intersection of the '*science-society-me*' framework.

Choosing a research topic involves, to varying degrees, the balancing of competing interests, typically of scientific conventions, society/community, and researchers (I add research participants to the list in my propositions). Owing to power imbalances, the science and society domains are more likely to dominate the decision e.g., when students pick a topic because it is a major gap area in knowledge, or its timeliness and importance to society e.g., climate change. Or even just because the faculty give funding for it. Nonetheless, in literature, proponents of the '*science-society-me*' framework emphasise individual researcher's interest in the topic - in the 'me' domain - as crucial for sustaining the research project over a long period (Adhikari, 2020; Davis, 2001; Jensen, 2013). However, what is not explained is the way to ensure a junior researcher can practically prioritise their interest over the predominant influence of e.g., funder, faculty, and supervisor's interest among other competing issues. Additionally, focusing narrowly on a researcher's interest may not be enough to sustain a study involving other people as participants.

As a potential alternative, I propose turning to affects – the intersection of experience and history between people – when choosing a topic like I did with my MA thesis. The result is likely to be more inclusive for research participants yet encompassing both society by focusing on concrete societal issues, and science in empirical novelty. In this way, focusing on affects may help a researcher incorporate input from four domains in a more balanced manner.

In this approach, a researcher turns both inwards to self, and outwards to culture simultaneously. Turning to self to draw on embodied features that mediate their lived reality such as gender, age, legal status, nationality, ethnicity, religion etc., to turn outwards, to glean cultural realities, conditions, truth, possibilities that affect them, and similar people, and the way their interactions affect those in return. This becomes the source of topic, research questions, units of analysis etc. In the breakfast turning point moment, the experiences of three

people, momentarily linked by historical questions of class, inclusion, fairness, discrimination, colonialization, expand the relevance of that experience to an entire demographic. Such research will not always be about the individual; however, the interest must originate from the way a researcher interacts with and is affected by a specific issue (Ellis et al., 2011; Adams et al., 2017). As a result, research becomes a tool for intervening in the issue being studied which can take many forms e.g., social justice advocacy, care (Ellis, 2016,2017), honour (Adams et al., 2017). This is not a new proposition and research focused on social interaction and social production is common in the autoethnography, ethnography, and biographical research traditions (see e.g., Boylorn, 2016; Ellis, 2016, 2017; Mingé & Sterner, 2016). Such research addresses a vast array of issues, ranging from small groups to large populations; specific, general, small issues to global transformational issues such as fascism, social inequality, and social injustice. I will argue that this approach to research allows for practical inclusion of a researcher's biography as well as the biographies of similar demographics in the research process, which in turn enforces a researcher's agency in foundational decision-making process, making it an ideal approach for doing research affectively.

Further on interest - sustaining longevity and making it more inclusive, I suggest uncovering the historical origin of an issue and being rooted in that rather than surface interest in a symptom. For me, besides a PhD degree, my goal as a researcher is to do social justice advocacy for underserved populations. That drive is embedded in my history and current biography as a black, African, woman, migrant, and first-generation doctoral student. Engaging research as social justice advocacy delimits suitable research topics, units of analysis, and research questions. Such a grounding allows for occasional intense personalised experiences, such as the breakfast experience in vignette one to become a resource for research. Furthermore, from an affective standpoint, we know that personalised experience is not siloed experience. Rather, it is socially embedded, and includes others who contribute to the development of those experiences, which in my case were fellow student migrants from Africa (Ahmed, 2004; Wetherell, 2012).

DOING DATA COLLECTION AFFECTIVELY

In March of 2018 as I analysed my MA thesis data, I realised that my data did not answer the research questions I had set out to answer nor fulfil the initially set research objective. Although iteration and a grounded approach meant that I could revise my research questions and conclude my study, that only skirted the real issue. The issue was the 'feasibility' and 'possibility' of scientifically answering the research question I genuinely wanted to address, and which I knew my participants had a lot to share on. The only problem was that discourses migrants had at get-togethers, birthday parties, or in conversations with friends were starkly different from the interview conversations I managed to collect. The experience led me to understand that the interview, as a data collection tool, does not guarantee researchers the actual 'story', 'narrative', 'issue' that the researcher is seeking to understand, and sometimes, nor the one that participants want to share. Sometimes, perhaps many, this incongruence prevails. This unnatural social interaction set-up produces its own performances, stories, and narratives. In retrospect, that experience illuminates two issues that individuals seeking to engage in affective research should address at the data collection stage (*Vignette 2 – Quivine*)

This vignette spotlights potential tensions between interest of researchers, research participants and other research stakeholders that manifest in the data collection phase. It raises the question of how researchers balance between the data they think they are looking for, the data they collect, and the data research participants intended to share – which can be different from what is actually shared. An incongruence between the three is likely as scientific data collection processes mediate and transform interaction between researchers and participants. Vignette two thus, underscores the question of whether the optimum interaction and thus balance between the various interests can be attained to ensure inclusion, and fair representation – justice in research. Notably the interest tension can easily fall in a researcher's blind spot since it typically becomes apparent in

retrospect. For instance, in my case, I realised an incongruence in participant's narratives only after comparing their narratives in non-research settings such as migrant group informal social gatherings, vis a vis interview narratives. Based on vignette two, I will draw on the affective research practices of compassionate interviewing, and reflexivity (introduced in section 2.0.) to show one plausible way out of the data collection impasse in vignette 2.

In the introduction, I presented **two propositions** for the development of just research practices that incorporate affects. They provide a good base for deciding the type of data suitable for a research project and how to obtain it. Both address the relationship between the researcher, the research context and research participants.

The emphasis of the first proposition is the 'space' of research and how that affects research, particularly data collection (Tealman-Healy, 2003). To engage affectively, I suggest relocating the space of research engagement from the concretely or abstractly demarcated 'realm of science' which makes research one sided and gives 'science' predominance regardless of discipline or topic. The 'science space' of research, made up of technical terms, theory, concepts and specific ways of knowing, and the rules enforced therein, shape researchers' choices of methods, as well as ways of engaging with research participants. Therefore, changes can be introduced through a careful consideration and matching of research methods and research project. However, superficial changes e.g., tools for data collection may not be enough. Rather, a researcher should endeavour to balance the distribution of power in a practical way by moving the space of research into routine social interactional spaces. To this end, scheduling interviews at a café is not sufficient. Instead, researchers should engage and be familiar with the daily spaces that shape their participants' lived realities. A researcher studying migrant labour market integration will become aware of key day-to-day situations from social engagements, trade union affiliation, legal status dynamics, to workplace experiences. Familiarising with research participants daily life contexts need not always be data collection moments to be recorded (Ellis, 2016). It expands understanding, providing the researcher with useful information for engaging and interacting

meaningfully with 'still' moment data collected e.g., via semi-structured interviews.

Lived experiences are difficult to capture in a single or few static moments and in unnatural interaction settings as most interviews are, and here positionality can mediate. As an African migrant in Finland, I have first-hand experience of integration in Finland, social networks consisting of my research focus demographic, and I am intensely conscious of my research as I literally live it. The most concrete benefit an insider positionality provides is that I am constantly in the context my research unfolds in, and I allow myself to be actively aware of the fact that I am a researcher, as well as a research participant – reflexivity. I am also present in migrants' insider groups where conversations about integration circulate more naturally, freely, and earnestly, sometimes in anger, adoration, and rationalisation. Therefore, when I interview migrants in Finland, I know the background context to most stories and statements they say as 'given', that another researcher without my 'third eye' would miss or just be unable to connect to the entire narrative told. This helps in sustaining conversational flow and dialogue and can improve the quality of the data collected in terms of comprehension, and inclusion. This is also how I knew in 2018 that my data was not inclusive and missed participant's voice.

Following the 2018 epiphany, I revised my data collection methods, for future studies, turning to more interactive data collection tools, specifically biographical narrative interviews to improve inclusion. Biographical interviews are scarcely directed by the interviewer, and collect robust data traversing time – past, present, future – and places, allowing participants space to develop, revise, and improve their narrative (See Mrozowicki, 2011; Ellis, 2016). Biographical interviewing allows for a shift of the research 'space', into the daily as well as a shift in the relationship between the researcher and participants. To shift the space of research, biographies underscore the participants life and the stages in it, which the participant is the expert in. Additionally, biographies use ordinary interactional language which de-emphasises the 'scientificity' of the process. Lastly, biographical narratives are long, often beginning with general, past events that participants may not find difficult to speak about, because they are past. Because of the

duration covered by general phase questions, participants are usually more relaxed by phase two of the interview, when the research topic is discussed in detail (see Mrozowicki, 2011).

The second argument is closely linked to the first, and expands it to focus on the nature of the relationship between researchers and research participants. At the core of this proposition is power relations in research engagements and the exercise of reflexivity. The question of power can be operationalised in several ways; however, the chapter focuses on how it impacts engagement with data by asking how a researcher can engage compassionately with the data collection process (Ellis, 2017). Here, compassion refers to a preoccupation with care and honour for research participants; ensuring that the research engagement can have a positive impact on research participants and similar demographics, as well as ensuring that other stakeholders can make use of the research outputs, e.g., data for the good of the research target group. Compassionate data collection, therefore, considers what type of data is the most appropriate to collect from the perspective of respondents, and the various ways that data can be appropriated towards certain ends. In that regard, it asks whether that content would serve research participants as much as it would serve the researcher, or other stakeholders appropriating it (Weatherall, 2019). Closely linked is reflexivity, which is defined here as the exercise of considering one's own varied ways of knowing, especially how those interact with participants' performance in interviews and other data collection situations. A reflexive researcher thus, tunes into their own head, for the sake of ensuring a fairly inclusive interaction with participants in data collection (Adams et al., 2017).

For this I turn to Ellis (2014, 2016, 2017) to propose a shift of methods to doing compassionate research in developed professional relationships and partnerships with research participants. A developed relationship influences interactions between individuals, as people tend to communicate and 'perform' differently to those they are in a developed relationship with than 'strangers' (Ellis, 2017). In qualitative research, rapport is emphasised, but the emphasis is even greater for qualitative inquiry into sensitive topics such as migrant integration. A developed partnership might also empower participants to become

more involved in the research and engage more in directing conversations and topic selection, which culminate in creation of a different type and form of data that would potentially be inaccessible otherwise. Similarly, the researcher may be invited into controlled access participant's spaces, which would also impact how the researcher engages data from participant. However, not all research questions and topics will benefit from long term engagement with participant, just as it is not practical to develop professional partnerships with all research participants where the sample is big. However, where that is possible, such as in my research, research with invested, included partners will inevitably improve the quality of data. Although I engage with an average of 20 participants in each study, I have sustained 4 participants since 2018, and my plan is to continue working with them to document the integration trajectories of highly educated African migrants in Finland. In the following section, I develop the analysis around a fable shared by a participant I have worked with for the past 3 years.

ANALYSIS: USING LOCAL THEORIES OF INTERPRETATION AND STAYING CLOSE TO DATA

'Once upon a time lived a toad with a special yet tricky ability to adapt to life threatening change. When in danger, the toad could transform its outer skin into a hard shell for protection while buying time for escape. However, to use the special ability effectively, the toad needed full understanding of the situation and incisive decision-making. One hot afternoon, the toad leapt into a pond to cool off; except the pond was not a pond, but a pot half filled with water for someone's afternoon tea. The pot was put on fire and soon the toad noticed that the pond was heating up. Aware of its special ability, the toad decided to wait it out while assessing the situation, hoping that the pond would cool down again soon. However, the toad's special ability is only an emergency survival mechanism that is unsustainable for long periods. To turn its skin into a hard shell and sustain it that way, the toad uses up a lot of its energy, and if it sustains the mechanism for a long time,

it eventually runs out of energy, becomes unable to jump out of the pond into safety, or sustain the hard-shell protection. After about seven minutes, the toad started feeling the heat from the water meaning that it could no longer sustain the hard shell. Paradoxically, the moment the toad realised that the only solution was to jump out of the pond, was also the time it did not have any energy left in it. In the end, the toad died inside the pot. But what killed the toad?' (**Vignette 3 – Elvis in Ndomo & Lillie, 2022 - forthcoming**)

"Resilience is useless! (and so are resistance and reworking): Migrants in the Finnish labour market" is the title of the second paper in my planned dissertation, in press, set for publication in 2022. The toad story is a variation of the boiling frog fable that one research participant's grandfather told him repeatedly as a young boy. It has become a yard stick he uses to evaluate difficult situations so he can react appropriately and in time. Now an African migrant in Finland, he thought the fable was an apt analogy of his migration story, and a good warning and judging lens for other migrants in the same position. The telling of the fable, and the resourcefulness of the fable in the research context left a significant impression on me and shaped the analysis and interpretation process of that paper significantly. In this subsection, I draw on my experience of analysing and writing my second PhD dissertation article **to show how I weave my insider positionality, principles of compassionate researching, and a commitment to social justice advocacy in the analysis process.**

In empirical research, data analysis and interpretation is the peak of engagement with content as it identifies the concrete outcomes of a study and packages them for dissemination. The closely interlinked questions of **representation, inclusion and ownership, and access** are central to this process as they underlie the impact a research project can have. All three are core to the balancing of research stakeholders' interests. Representation considers the extent to which a researcher imposes their own perspective and standpoint over research participants'. Inclusion and ownership at the level of analysis considers the extent to which a researcher involves research participants in the analysis which varies by research approach. Lastly,

access concerns the packaging and presentation of the findings and outcomes of a study, including readability and publication platforms. All researchers address these issues during analysis and presentation of findings, however, an affective researcher's preoccupation while addressing these issues should be with the research participant's interest first, before theirs, science and society. So, how did I deal with these questions while writing the second paper for my PhD dissertation introduced above?

Early into the research when writing an abstract conceptualising the paper, I recognised a disconnect or an uneasy fit between my participants lived experiences as told, and the central theoretical tool for analysis (*onset of a turning point*). Since research was done as a subproject within a large consortium project, core features such as theoretical concepts were uniform across eight national teams spread all over the EU. Drawing on a recently concluded empirical analysis, each national team was to develop an academic paper exploring the agency-vulnerability nexus of third country national migrants integrating in EU national labour markets. Specifically, we investigated the ways individuals exert agency in the integration process, using the concept of resilience to show how they make use of policies to navigate barriers, and build on enablers to integration.

Our biographical data consisted of varied stories of migrants navigating the Finnish labour market, applying unique strategies and tactics to 'survive'. Survival was the term that some of our participants used in their stories of integration, and survival in this context was a complex concept, and fitting it into resilience would have been problematic. Substituting resilience for survival would change the meaning and potential of participants' stories for policy makers, participants themselves, and other stakeholders. For me as a researcher, the epiphany was the illumination of the powerful position of language and theory in data analysis, as well as the significance of the analysis stage of research from the perspective of power. In an academic research context, the power balance between the language of mainstream and established theory and the language of local theories of interpretation typically used in interviews, tips towards the

former, due to academic conventions of research. However, as a researcher focused on social justice advocacy, my interest is to create space for research participants' voices and presenting counter narratives to the dominant ones that exclude them.

Reflexivity as being in tune with one's various ways of knowing and how those shape their interactions, and compassionate researching that makes research participants the priority client in research can provide potential solutions to this impasse. Drawing on Denzin's (1989) conceptualisation of local theories of interpretation, I shifted the focus of my analysis to the varied representations of lived experiences. The differential points participants made about time, space, survival, and change through their own interpretive blocks. For instance, a participant's variation of the boiling frog fable, as an integration assessment tool and a yardstick for enforcing decision timelines. The fable provided an analytical tool applicable to other integration stories, thus a local analytical tool separate from mainstream theory. Importantly, it highlighted unique nuances in the integration process in Finland, especially the link between time, resources, and integration outcomes. By highlighting the nuances of survival, the paper could then problematise an overly positive blanket representation of resilience as agentic power accessible to actors such as our research participants. This was crucial because of the policy-shaping potential of agency - reified versus problematised. The policy implications of reified agency can be dire for migrants as it effectively shifts the responsibility for integration from the ideally responsible institutions e.g., employment offices, to individual migrants. It does this by misleadingly portraying them as empowered actors, capable of relying on their own means, strength and capacities to integrate using [misinterpreted] empirical evidence.

Our analysis process drew on a number of affective research practices. First, an insider positionality and the access it grants to the daily lived experiences of migrants such as our participants enabled me to explore the boiling 'toad' fable with a participant as an analytical tool. A compassionate approach to research drove our interest to ensure that the outcome of our analysis and research in general,

prioritised serving the participant group, beginning by elevating their voice and their perspective as much as possible. However, the voice raised in interviews is often transformed, or developed in the analysis process, although to a limited degree in our research as we relied on participants own local theories of interpretation in the analysis. Sensitivity to the policy implications of the survivor versus resilience framing and the use of the boiling 'toad' fable ensured better representation and inclusion. Lastly, use of local theories of interpretation, accompanied by significant quotations and vignettes in participants own 'language' should improve accessibility by research participants.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The chapter has attempted to problematise the researcher-research (content) relationship as normatively practiced in empirical social science research projects with human beings as participants, shaped by the science-society-me power framework. This I did by sharing own lived experiences of research, especially instances when a major understanding occurred revealing weakness in the normative practice, and those when practice deviated from the norm but resulted in a methodological breakthrough for the research project (turning point moments and epiphanies). In the discussion, I gauged my own experiences against a rubric of justice – extent of justness of research practices – defined as consisting of features such as inclusivity, equality (especially of the distribution of power), fair representation, compassion, reflexivity, and honour. The chapter used affect as its core theoretical tool, operationalised as a capacity, and as an intersection of potential for reciprocal action between empowered bodies. Applied to the context of researcher-research content relationship, considerations of affect morphed naturally into questions of justice and its discrete features such as inclusion, representation, equality etc.

In the discussion, the chapter spotlights the tensions existing between the varied interests of stakeholders in a research project that often fail to be satisfied by the science-society-me framework at the three

stages of the research process: picking a topic, choosing data collection methods, and interpreting and appropriating findings. Then, drawing on my lived researcher experiences, I extend two recommendations for abating the power imbalance that relegates research participants and researchers to the periphery in decision making, vis a vis predominant science and society.

The first methodological propositions suggest redefining the space in which research work is done with a focus of moving towards an intersection of the three (plus research participants), rather than singular hegemony. This would be implemented in terms of several discrete modifications e.g., of research methods, data collection tools, analytical considerations, and of the widely accepted tools of the trade e.g., literature review to identify gaps in knowledge. Changes will apply through the three research phases in focus here. The second proposition recommends Carolyne Ellis' compassionate researching, and thus targets the relationship between researchers and research participants and proposes involving research participants more comprehensively, and consistently by establishing developed relationships with them. Ongoing relationships diversify data collection moments and reinforce proposition one by constantly adjusting the space where research takes place.

In this chapter, my objective was to explore research practices that are more just, across the phases of research, and especially towards stakeholders most excluded by normative research practice. I attempted to address this through the two recommendations above. Although, the chapter develops only one plausible way to engage research affectively, within a specific discipline, these lessons, drawn largely from ethnography, autoethnography, and biographical research can be applied to varied research context in the social sciences and humanities.

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