'I Know Him So Well': Contracting/tual 'Insiderness', and Maintaining Access and Rapport in a Philippine Fishing Community

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Abstract

'Insider' researchers are generally conceived to have an epistemic privilege in the field over 'outsider' researchers, especially around the issues of gaining access and building rapport with research participants. However, access and rapport once secured must be continuously maintained and this poses several methodological challenges to the researcher. This can be a particular problem if the people being researched have an intimate knowledge of the researcher's life. This intimate knowledge can affect the maintenance of access and rapport with research participants, particularly in a small community characterised by insecure economic prospects and whose members' survival could be affected by the researcher's political experience. Based on an ethnographic study of a fishing community in the Philippines, this article is concerned with the various nuances of maintaining access and rapport in one's own community and its ever-evolving economic and political conditions, which then contribute to the shifting positionality of 'insider' researchers' status in the field.

Keywords: *Access, Fishing Community, Insider Research, Philippines, Positional Space, Rapport*

Introduction

1.1 The focus of the present article is the methodological issues surrounding 'insider' research. Of particular concern will be the impact of my biography on the dynamics of the 'insider' researcher-researched relationship. This includes my previous involvement in my community's political life as well as the time that I spent researching within this community. I will reflect on and critically engage with how the knowledge of my political biography by my research participants has informed issues of access and rapport in the field. Although, in general, there is much methodological discussion about the impact of the 'insider' researcher's age (Abu-Lughod 1986; Mannay 2010), gender (Abu-Lughod 1986; Ahmed et al 2010; Bolak 1996; Griffith 1998; Kusow 2006; Mazzei and O'Brien 2009), ethnicity/nationality (De Andrade 2000; Fourmillier 2010; Guevarra 2006; Kanuha 2000; Kusow 2003; Subedi 2006; Williams 1996; Zaman 2008), and socio-economic status (Cupples and Kindon 2003; Ganga and Scott 2006; Lal 1996; Mannay 2010; Williams 1996) on the conduct of research, there is limited methodological and reflexive consideration on how the research participants' intimate knowledge of the researcher's political biography constrains, and at the same time deepens in varying degrees, their involvement in the fieldwork, and results in improved/constrained access and rapport in the field. This article endeavours to fill this gap.

1.2 This article is based on a doctoral fieldwork project that was conducted for six months in a small fishing community in the Philippines. The project looked at how a fishing community adapted its power, gender, and economic relations in the context of a fisheries crisis that has been brought about by overfishing, unsystematic town planning, and weak regulatory capabilities of both local and national maritime agencies (see, for example, Turgo 2010). Having been born and spent most of my growing-up in Sta. Filomena (the real name of the community has been anonymised as part of the research project) meant that the research project was an 'insider' research, which was conducted by a native returning to his own community "who in studying contexts with which he is intimately familiar has access, knowledge and freedom of movement that allows him to develop particular insight into contexts not visible to outsiders" (Karra and Phillips 2008, p. 542). True to my epistemological belief in the evolving membership of researchers in any fieldwork setting (i.e. theirs/ours is a position of becoming and not of being), I have

scare quoted the word 'insider' and 'outsider' throughout this article in order to underscore "the malleability or the situational nature of the boundary separating outsiders from insiders" (Kusow 2003, p. 592).

1.3 Boccagni's (2011) stand on the use of old field notes in his attempt to textualise the progression of his relationships with research participants from rapport to collaboration means that "the article...relies on a thorough re-reading of my field notes and interview transcripts as a 'textualised form' that mirrors my attempts to appropriate 'data constituted in discursive, dialogical...conditions' (Boccagni 2011, p. 734).

1.4 This article has four sections. Immediately after the introduction, I will consider some issues concerning 'insider' research (primarily those surrounding its instability as a research position in the field). I will then discuss how "positional spaces - areas where the situated knowledge's of both parties in the (ethnographic) encounter - engender a level of trust and cooperation" (Mullings 1999, p. 340) and at the same time (as a counter-effect) act as occasions for the severance of access and rapport. Following this, I will deal with my own biography and the political history of the community that was being studied. This contextualises and sets the tone for the next section of this article, which details issues surrounding access, and rapport and positional spaces in relation to my experience in the field. In the discussion section, I will unpack further the notion of 'insider' research via my involvement in a political event in the community. The last section concludes this article and identifies some other possible research topics to advance the initiated discussion on 'insider' research and issues around access and rapport.

'Insider' Research and Positional Spaces

2.1 The emergence of poststructuralist and feminist methodologies in research has placed into focus the inherently simplistic categorical division of identity between 'insider' and 'outsider' in the field (Haraway 1991; Harding 1991, 1993; Minh-ha 1989; Narayan 1993; Visweswaran 1994). This signals the now received methodological doxa that there is no vantage point, in the context of a fragmented and plural self in contemporary world, from which one could inhabit an 'insider' or an 'outsider' position at all times in a given research setting. The research process avers Ladino (2002) is far from static since our identities as researchers are made and remade through the research process. Roberts further explains:

The researcher's identity is not necessarily fixed in some absolute sense [...] but it may translocate through categories and identities, such that at some times and places the researcher may emphasise certain positionalities and identities and not others. (2001, p. 1.2; citing, Herod 1999, p. 321)

2.2 The failure to consider the intersectional nature of the self in any field setting elides the rich and nuanced panorama of the research field and, concomitantly, the agency of the researcher and the forces that drive the changing life dynamics in the place/s under scrutiny. Furthermore, the researcher carries embodied distinctions for example of gender, race, ethnicity, disability and class, 'all of which are constitutive elements in the research process' (Woodward 2008, p. 537). The self in the field is never singular and the same at all times. Narayan (1993), for example, contends that "at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist (or insider/outsider researcher) in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpreting communities and power relations" (Narayan 1993, p. 671). This leads to the question: just how native is a native anthropologist?

2.3 Being an 'insider', therefore, is not a given status but is instead a negotiable/negotiated position in the field. It is a position of becoming rather than a position of being. Although a researcher thinks that he is an 'insider' by virtue of a shared commonality with the people or community that he is studying, this status does not guarantee a ready-made 'uncritical' acceptance by research participants. Kusow (2003), for example, explained that his being a male Somali denied him access to the world of women Somalis in his field site. In this case, while his being a Somali opened doors to a Somali community in Canada, his being male, on the other hand, closed doors to other sectors of the people that he was studying. It is in the same vein that Abu-Lughod's (1986) gender provided her the opportunity to have an intimate glimpse of women's lives in a Bedouin community in Egypt while at the same time it excluded her from the inner world of male daily lives. Consequently, in different situations, some embodied distinctions or status attributes become dominant or most noticeable in the field while others are sidelined. It is in this context that at the beginning of the project the researcher can be an 'insider' but then find him/herself an 'outsider' at a later point following the occurrence of events that activates his/her other attributes. However, in saying this, the methodological importance of being in 'insider' in a particular setting should not be elided or obscured. As Mannay explains:

The notion of being an insider or an outsider, [...] is inadequate in an absolute sense. However, to ignore questions of proximity is to assume that knowledge comes from nowhere allowing researchers to become an abstract concept rather than a site of accountability. It may be misguided to privilege a particular type of knowledge but it is imperative to acknowledge that perspective is always premised upon access to knowledge. Thus, inside/outsider discourses are important because they place the researcher at the centre of the production of knowledge. (2010, pp 92-3)

2.4 To highlight the process of becoming (and not of being) an 'insider' (primarily around the issues of access and rapport, and the epistemological salience of the 'insider' discourse in the production of knowledge) I will use Mullings' (1999) concept of positional spaces with some further refinements. While Mullings (1999) deployed this concept in problematising how she was able to gain access in field interviews amongst workers and managers in a cross-cultural setting in Jamaica's information processing industry, I will expand its use and deploy the concept of positional spaces to another locality, such as the fishing community that I studied during my PhD.

2.5 The spatial metaphor that positional spaces conjure is apt in situating my location and degree of involvement or disengagement with my research participants. In visualising this geographical situatedness of the self in the polygon of affairs amongst the people I looked into, I invoke the idea of a Ben diagram wherein contact points among participating parties are shaded. The shaded parts are the points of convergence where the interests and commonalities of the researcher and the researched meet. Positional spaces, therefore, are 'contact' and 'contract' zones that create points of convergence between the researcher and those being researched, thus providing the impetus for a closer and more involved working relationship between the two. This convergence then creates a particular atmosphere of trust and cooperation between the researcher and those being researched, which should allow the former to probe deeper into the lives of the latter. However, since Mullings (1999) limits her notion of positional spaces on the acquisition of trust and cooperation between researcher and researched, I would like to push the parameters of its use further.

2.6 As mentioned previously, positional spaces are not just contact zones, they are also contract zones since both researcher and researched enter into a contract at the moment of contact, which in this case could be rendered void once contact could not be sustained. Thus as Mullings (1999, p. 340) avers, these positional spaces "are often transitory and cannot be reduced to the familiar boundaries of 'insider'/'outsider' privilege based on visible attributes such as gender, ethnicity or class". By carefully crafting an ideal representation of ourselves to be used for the consumption of research participants, we attempt to create positional spaces that can create the critical co-operation and trust of people in the field. However, in so doing, it is also possible that we are engendering a closing of doors in other sectors of the field since what we are highlighting about ourselves could also precipitate the possible erasure/deletion of a contact zone with others. Thus, in the opening up of positional spaces, while the emergence of trust and cooperation between researcher and researched is enacted, a visible effect could also be the cessation of access and rapport amongst other people and groups in the community. Positional space here then is used as a more nuanced and dynamic depiction of relations in the field. It essays forth an argument that places are never homogenous and when positional spaces open up there is a likelihood that fissures and rifts amongst people would be made more evident, which then complicates what is already a complicated and conflicted field to begin with.

My Biography and the Political Landscape of the Community

3.1 I was born in a district close to the community that is being studied. I attended local schools in the town until the age of 16, when I moved to the capital city Manila to finish a degree at the University of the Philippines. Although I spent most of my intervening years in Manila, I would, until I went to the UK in 2006 to study a postgraduate degree, visit the community from time to time. Following a five-year period as a municipal councillor representing the youth sector (1995-1999), I was employed by the then incumbent mayor (who is the politician friend that I refer to in this paper) as his consultant for education. So for six years, while holding an academic post at the University of the Philippines, I was also working as a consultant to the mayor, visiting the town and the community at least once a week.

3.2 For over 50 years, my father was a fisherman. He passed away in 2006 at the age of 63. Although we did not live in the same place as most of the other fishermen and their families, I was brought up surrounded by people whose primary occupation was fishing and its ancillary work (e.g. selling fish and mending fish nets). Beginning in 1993, I had an active involvement in local politics as a youth leader and I served as a youth representative in the municipal council until I graduated from university. This position deepened my relationship with the people in the community: I became their conduit to local politicians. When the then incumbent mayor retired from politics, his son stepped in and became his *de facto* heir. When his son eventually became our town mayor, we became political allies. Thus, when I left the Philippines to do postgraduate work in the UK, my reputation in the community as a staunch political ally of this politician had been cemented and my political biography was an open book in the community.

3.3 This fishing community is a fairly small community of some 708 inhabitants. It is one of the forty districts of the local town. When I started my fieldwork, there was a localised fisheries crisis which had driven many of the fishermen away from the fishing industry. The community, as are most other fishing communities in the Philippines, was impoverished (see also Dumont 1992; Guieb 2009; Mangahas 1993, 2000, 2004; Nimmo 2002; Ushijima and Zayas 1994, 1996). To compensate for the lost income due to the fisheries crisis, many of the men also worked in construction sites while the women worked in the city as factory workers, household helpers, and store attendants (see Turgo 2010). Politically, the community was known to be a political fiefdom of my politician friend (the former mayor). When I left for my PhD studies in the UK, my politician friend had finished three terms as mayor of the town (three years per term) and was, therefore, ineligible to run in the same position. He ran for a parliamentary seat but lost to a more established political clan. His older brother ran for mayor but lost to the husband of a first cousin: in the Philippines, it's all in the family!

3.4 In 2008, when I returned to the community to do fieldwork, a political crisis was brewing in town. A group of disgruntled political leaders who were identified with my politician friend were calling for a new election to re-validate the incumbent mayor's political legitimacy. The incumbent mayor was perceived to be a snob, arrogant, inaccessible, and exacting a political vendetta on his opponents by denying them projects and assistance. The community was said to have suffered because of its political allegiance to my politician friend. A number of projects were reported to have been suspended and people were alleged to have been denied of a livelihood and medical assistance. It was in the midst of this political turmoil that I set foot in the community to do my research.

3.5 The choice of using my own community as research site was predicated on a number of practical, methodological and theoretical considerations. My research allotment was limited and embarking on

research in an unfamiliar environment was financially untenable, though I should say, it would also have been epistemologically challenging. Methodologically, amongst other advantages, I believed that studying in my own community would greatly reduce the “cognitive and emotional efforts necessary for adjustment and comprehension of an otherwise foreign culture” (Zaman 2008, p. 150). Theoretically, prior to embarking on my postgraduate studies in the UK, I had been wondering for years about how local ways of living had remained relatively unaltered in the community amidst observations by many that globalisation was re-configuring all forms of life and modes of places. I wanted to find out how and what made it possible.

3.6 Having been born and raised in a place not far from the community and having a father who was a fisherman and whose friends were mostly from the fishing community, meant that my status in this study was as an ‘insider’ researcher. I spoke the language, my mother and older brother were still living in the place where I was born, my childhood friends were mostly from the fishing community, and I knew most of the people there and many of the local people already knew me personally. However, I was also an ‘outsider’, to a certain extent. Although my father was a fisherman, I had never been a fisherman. Unlike most of my friends, I had practically spent my entire adult life in the city and had only spent some intermittent visits to the community. My education was far more advanced than that of anyone else in the community. After my college years, my adult life had revolved around my work in a local university in Manila rather than the people in the fishing community. Having been university educated and having acquired a certain degree of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1989, 2000) in some ways created an evident socio-economic gradient between myself and my research participants.

Access and Rapport in the Field

4.1 How the researcher deals with the unpredictable is dependent upon the researcher’s own personal disposition, the role the researcher adopts and the participants and site(s) of investigation involved; all of which influence the collection and interpretation of data (Russell 2005, p. 182). This points to a challenging and complicated process of negotiating access and rapport in the field. Failure on the part of the researcher to favourably present oneself could spell troubles, if this is unsuccessful then it could result the termination of the research. As Wall and Stasz observe, ‘the process of accounting for oneself on entering the field as an ethnographer is an undertaking on which the outcome of the entire research process ultimately lies’ (2010, p. 363).

4.2 To secure a successful research outcome, there are different ways in which issues around access and rapport are negotiated in the field. Laurilla spoke about ‘utilising critical events in the field that can balance the inherently uneven relationship’ (1997, p. 407) between researchers and researched and, therefore, in the process obtain access to and rapport with research participants. For example, in her study of resistance amongst secondary school students in England and Australia, Russell (2005) related how she kept silent about her knowledge of a particular misbehaviour in the school by students when she was called in for a conference by the principal. This critical event allowed her to further her rapport with students, primarily those who were involved in the misbehaviour, and balanced the geometry of power, which at the beginning of her fieldwork was more on the side of students. Her decision to refuse to talk even in the presence of the principal furthered her integration amongst the students, who were quick to acknowledge her supposed act of siding with them by opening themselves to her.

4.3 Furthermore, in gaining access and establishing rapport, researchers are able to fashion themselves according to the expectations of the people around them (Coffey 1999); therefore, ‘the alignment between a field researcher’s attributes and those of her potential informants has long been recognised as relevant to the collection of valid data in the field’ (Mazzei and O’Brien 2009, p. 360). Abu-Lughod (1986), in her stay in a Bedouin community in Egypt, played her part as a dutiful daughter while Fournillier (2003) worked as a mask maker, cleaner, and assistant in a mask factory in Trinidad. In studying a Southern nationalist movement in the US, Jansson presented himself as heterosexual guy since he assumed that by exposing his true self, that is, being gay, ‘he would have been received quite differently’ (Jansson 2010, p. 21). When researching a qualitative study of midwifery practices in an Australian hospital, Burns et al (2010) wore clothes similar to the uniform of midwives in order to neutralise her presence as a researcher. In his study of people living in a housing council in New York, Venkatesh (2002) acted as a driver for some people and even became a customer to some enterprising research participants. In these instances, the researchers have all assumed identities that were not their own.

4.4 In my own case, I came to the field and told everyone that I was there to conduct research. Some members of the local community could not understand why someone like me wanted to observe their everyday life; my reply was that I was writing a book about the community. I presumed, rather naively, that no one expected me to play a particular role to be accepted by them. In the first few days many people found my presence odd and sometimes amusing but as the days went by I was treated more as someone coming home after several years abroad (Turgo 2012). Reviewing my field notes and remembering my daily experience in the field, my first days in the community were replete with observations about how easy it was to gain access to and establish rapport with my research participants. For example, in one of my journal entries, I wrote:

I am having an easy time in the field! Everyone is very cooperative. I can’t ask for more!
(Field note entry 2008)

4.5 It was so easy to brush off, quite uncritically, the challenges attendant to being an ‘insider’ researcher and the potentials of being an ‘outsider’ in certain circumstances when the people in the field were all very friendly, accessible, and warm. Access came to me easily and rapport had never been an issue amongst my research participants. I was never able to reflect then about how boundaries shift, how ‘they differ(ed)’ according to the participant’s personality, dispositions, behaviour and position’ (Russell 2005, p. 193)

within the geometry of power in the community and in the context of its on-going economic difficulties and the local political turmoil.

4.6 In the beginning of my research, I did not pay much attention to my other self, that is, my role as an 'outsider'. Being an 'outsider' was in my peripheral vision and it was as an 'insider' that I impressed upon myself on the local community in the early days of my research. This attempt to edit out my being an 'outsider' and saliently banking on my 'insider' status is, of course, not an unproblematic methodological ploy to gain access to and establish rapport with the research participants. However, by consciously positioning myself as an 'insider', I lost track of reflecting critically on my hybrid identity, that of being also an 'outsider', in a sense a 'halfie' (Abu-lughod 1991). Then something happened. I became involved in a political drama gripping the town which exposed my precarious assumed 'insider' positionality. In what follows, I recount by way of a reflexive account this particular event and how my political biography affects in varying ways my access and rapport in the field.

The Opening Up of a Positional Space

5.1 In studying a group of women in rural Appalachia, Wall and Stasz (2010) lament how Wall was treated as an 'outsider' who was not to be trusted. Although 'Wall explained the project every way (she) could think of, the women were close-lipped whenever (she) sat down with them' (Wall and Stasz 2010, p. 363). Things changed though when she was invited to learn to quilt. When she agreed, the women then perceived that she was not just hanging around: she wanted to be a part of the group. Ostensibly, in my case, I would have my own 'invitation-to-quilt moment' which would result in my adopting both 'insider' and 'outsider' positions in the community. My case was different from Wall though since I had never been treated as an 'outsider' from the beginning of my research. I was in fact made welcome in all the activities that I requested to attend. This 'insider' membership was for me secure and an 'intrinsic' quality of my presence in the field, until a series of events in the community paved the way for a methodological epiphany.

5.2 Two months into my research, an old friend dropped by our house and told me that my politician friend wanted to see me in his house. Presumably, it was a dinner get-together and other old friends were also invited. All along I was thinking that it was a private meeting between the two of us and his family and some close friends but I was wrong, it was a big gathering and later on I discovered that it was a meeting of his political leaders running the campaign against the incumbent mayor. When I entered the living room, I was received enthusiastically by those present. Upon seeing me, my politician friend told the assembled crowd: 'See, I told you. He will help us!' The meaning of this did not sink in with me immediately. There was a round of applause and all that I could do was to acknowledge the warm reception given to me by waving my hand.

5.3 After some time had passed, and having eaten and talked with some of the people present, I realised that I was there not just to meet my politician friend but presumably to be a part of the campaign. In the meeting that ensued, I offered my help, although I told my politician friend that I would do it inconspicuously. I told him that my focus was my research, I could not join them in their sorties but I could write manifestos. I must admit that my refusal to be identified publicly was occasioned more by my fear that local politics in the Philippines are characteristically violent and I might be drawn into it and less by my anxieties about my relations with the research informants in the field. The community that I was studying had always been a staunch supporter of the family of my politician friend and I had always thought that this had not changed since I left. My willingness to help was also occasioned by my personal sympathy towards the people in the community. Having heard much about the complaints of many against the incumbent mayor, I felt indignant and thought that I could do my share without sacrificing my time in the field. It never occurred to me that my presence in the meeting and my willingness to participate would have an impact on my research, especially with regard to access and rapport with the people in the community.

5.4 A few days after this meeting my involvement in the political campaign was publicly exposed. I attended a public gathering in the community that was organised by the political leaders of my politician friend. I was not supposed to attend it but since I was not doing anything else and most of the people were there, I decided to drop by. When I reached the venue (it was held in the community's open-air basketball court), the meeting had already started and I positioned myself in an inconspicuous corner. My motive was for my presence not to elicit any attention. All along I was thinking that I would remain unnoticed, but I was wrong. It could be that someone saw me and mentioned my presence to the person in charge of the meeting. Soon my name was called out and my presence was recognised. I was requested to sit in the front row, but it did not end there. All of the eight speakers began their speech by acknowledging my presence and telling the people that they were very happy to see me, one of their most trusted allies in the campaign! Then someone spoke of my going home not just to do research but also to be a part of their struggle against the incumbent mayor who was treating the people in the community poorly. In a booming voice, one of the speakers said:

I know him so well! He is in the community to help us advance our cause. He is in solidarity with us! He is from the community and he feels for us!

Everyone was looking at me. I was fidgeting in my seat. I never thought that my involvement would be publicly broadcast to everyone.

5.5 It is inevitable that, even though at times unnoticeable on the part of researchers, successive events in the field can lead to unexpected revisions and recalibrations of field relations. Many times, these social worlds are forced through indirect symbolic violence to expose itself with all its potential breaks and antimonies. Consequently, we can claim that in qualitatively oriented social inquiries, the researcher's

involvement is desirable because it reveals some features of the underlying structure of the field (Savvakis and Tzanakis 2004, p. 1.7). Thus, my involvement in the political drama in the community could well be a fortuitous research dilemma that triggered a reckoning amongst my research participants about who I was, aside that is from someone coming home to do research.

Enhanced Access, Better Rapport

6.1 Access (and rapport) should be considered to be a continuous negotiating process in which some actors are always in opposition and in which the researcher needs to take the changing and conflicting interests of organisational actors into account (Laurilla 1997, p. 410). The level and degrees of access and rapport change as researchers probe deeper into the field and expose more of themselves to the research participants. Events in the field can prove unravelling as they instigate changes in the ways that the researchers are perceived by those who are being researched. Commenting on her ever-evolving relationship with students and teachers in her study of student resistance in two secondary schools in England and Australia, Russell observes that:

The trust relationship fluctuated in intensity between the same participant and myself: feelings of trust and the detail of intimate information revealed varied depending upon the participant's mood, the event(s) of that day and the amount of time I had spent with that person. (2005, p. 193)

6.2 The following day after the event at the basketball court I joined a conversation in a grocery store. Without being asked, a fish vendor told me about his experience when he sought help from the mayor's office for his medical needs, he related how he was berated and shown the door by one of the mayor's staff. His story was corroborated by the other people present. I listened to their litany of complaints with surprise and fascination. Soon the topic shifted to the more mundane, yet this was the very material that I needed (such as marital infidelities, rigging of fish auctions, of men feeling emasculated selling fish and their manhood undermined by their wives working in and sending money from Manila). I had never heard these issues talked about publicly, at least not in my presence, and I wondered why this sudden opening up had happened.

6.3 In Mullings' (1999) concept of positional space, she speaks of finding a degree of common interest between the researcher and the researched and from this, trust and confidence can be furthered between the two. Previous to the events I recounted above, I was seen in the community as what I wanted them to see me: a researcher. Although I certainly positioned myself as an 'insider', many people must have seen me as just 'hanging around' (Wall and Stasz 2010) and not committed to the everyday travails of the people in the community. I was not 'insider' enough, my role as an insider was superficial. It can be said then that when I was identified publicly as an ally of my politician friend's fight against the injustices that the community was experiencing from the incumbent mayor, a positional space opened up, an invitation to quilt, as it were, mirroring the experience of Wall (Wall and Stasz 2010). The process of my authentic 'insider' membership in the community began when I acquiesced to the invitation to participate in the campaign. In a sense, because of this I was not just an 'insider' in the community but also an 'insider' with the community.

6.4 Coupled with my evolving 'insider' membership in the community, my research participants' perception of me as someone powerful (i.e. because of my past political position in the local government and my association with powerful people in the locality) could also in some ways be said to have affected their willingness to talk about some community issues which were highly relevant to my research. The relational effects of power can often result in what Keating (1993) refers to as 'closing off' (Rice 2010, p. 70) whereby in my case in the earlier parts of my research, my research participants refused to divulge information related to their public and private lives. For example, in the case of rigging fish auctions, they may have been reluctant to share this information with me at first out of the fear that I might have told the authorities about their actions, who in turn would interfere with how fish was traded in the community in order to level the playing field. Thus, on top of my considerable privileged position as an overseas-educated researcher, I was also in many ways someone possessing political power by virtue of my past position in the political hierarchy of the town and my association with local political figures. This furthered my gravitas in the community, which aggravated in turn the distance between me and my research participants regardless of my presumed 'insider' position in the community. However, this of course was 'deconstructed' and finally attenuated, if not totally cast off, by my unintended 'coming out' as a supporter of the campaign to oust the incumbent mayor.

6.5 In the ensuing days, knowing where the political sympathies of most of the people that I was conversing with lay, I actively sought information from the people spearheading the campaign and fed their views back to the people in the community. When people asked me for information, I told them, echoing the words of my politician friend, that given the enthusiastic response that the campaign was receiving from people in town, the election might happen before the end of the year (it was October 2008 at that point). In a sense, I became the spokesperson of my politician friend in the community, disseminating information about the campaign and at the same time, providing the people with some analysis about the on-going political contestation in town. My active involvement, although very limited to information dissemination, was a tactic on my part. I exploited this opening up of a positional space. Knowing that most people in the community were very hopeful that the election would push through, I rode on the crest of their sentiment. Many people believed that if my politician friend was able to reclaim his former seat then they would again be given help (such as payment for medical bills or money to buy food) and employment in municipal projects, which were denied to them by the incumbent mayor. Reflecting on this, my actions, although based on my desire to genuinely help the people in community in these testing and precarious hours of their lives, were also predicated on my quest to do excellent research in the field. My personal and professional worlds merged and it was difficult to extricate myself

from the other. Having done this, I realised that division between the personal and professional life of a researcher simply does not exist. The melding of personal and professional roles in ethnographic fieldwork makes for a 'messy, qualitative experience' which cannot readily or usefully be compartmentalised from other experiences and periods in our lives (Amit 2000, p. 7).

6.6 I pursued this opening up of positional space with vigour. I updated the people on the developments of the campaign on a daily basis. I became a highly valued information resource in the community. I engaged them dutifully with their questions and by engaging them; I was also able to throw in questions relevant to my research. For example, with regard to the rigging of bids in fish auction, I followed up the lead by asking more information from the person who brought it up in one of the talks that I participated in. Apparently, this practice had been going on for quite some time and it made me wonder why no one spoke about it with me in the first few months of my stay. This person then asked his friend, a fish dealer, to tell me more about it. This then led me to other people in the community who spoke freely of the practice. When I asked one of my respondents why they never told me about it before, they told me that they never thought that it was something that I was looking for and they had reservations 'spilling the beans', as it were, to others who had no interest in the practice and a deep involvement in the community who might tip off the authorities and other people involved in the fish auction. Having secured their trust because of my involvement in the ousting of the incumbent mayor, they saw me as one of them and, therefore, someone who would not betray them.

6.7 This voluntary accounting of community narratives relating to both public and private spheres of their lives revealed to me the precarious and provisional status of my membership in the community. I had never been quite an 'insider', after all. My support and involvement in the election paved the way for my 'insider' position in the community to be 'confirmed' by my research participants. Being identified as supporter of the campaign was both an exercise of my agency and at the same time, a product of my own political history and personal relations with the people in the community. I knew that I had to show my solidarity with the people in the community, which at the same time I discovered was able to serve the interest of my research. However, this choice would also have a counter-effect that resulted in the unravelling of my access to and rapport with others in the community.

6.8 The events above proved to be a catalyst to how my relationship with the people in the community took a different turn. My status as an 'insider' meant that I had become 'authentic' to many of the participants, while at the same time in the eyes of other research participants my status as an 'outsider' was confirmed. Two things were made visible here: firstly, my 'insider' position had not been validated until the time my position in the campaign to oust the incumbent mayor had been made public; and secondly, those who were supporting the incumbent mayor were ready to cooperate with me in my research regardless of my political biography but only up to a certain point. My involvement in the campaign drew the line. I was now an 'outsider' to those who supported the incumbent mayor as much as I had become an authentic 'insider' to those who wanted him deposed.

Losing Access, Wanting Rapport

7.1 Being able to gain better access and enhanced rapport with my research informants also had effects on my relations with others in the field. This points to the diverse composition of the community in terms of the economic and political interests of my research participants. It also highlights the precarious nature of positions that researchers assume for themselves in the field. As Hanson and Pratt observe,

Positions are not static; this is a point that needs to be underlined carefully in the contemporary context, in which marking by sexual orientation, class race etc. is sometimes used not only to open up new conceptual spaces but also to discipline and silence others. (1995, p. 25)

7.2 If my involvement in the campaign was a tool which worked in my advantage, then some adverse effects should also be mentioned. While those who were very vocal about their support to the election were at the same time quite generous of their time and became the source of new information about community life, I also noticed that those who were opposed to it and supporting the incumbent mayor were, while not visibly hostile to me, nonetheless starting to be evasive and making themselves scarce. This dissension and political cleavage in the community had never been visible to me; not, that is, until my position in the election was made clear. This came as a surprise since I always thought, rather naively, that people in the community would not hold it against me and my research. I thought that people would distinguish my political self from my researcher self. This division is, of course, untenable. There is simply no epistemological divide between the personal and the political in the field. The methodological self is also political.

7.3 This reconfiguration of field relations was brought about by the differences in which people in the community perceived the impact of the election on their economic lot. Some people saw the election as an opportunity to further their economic well-being while others saw it as a threat to their economic existence. And, being a party to the election, I was seen as on the other side of the fence by those who were opposed to it. My affinities and commonalities with other people were sidelined by my new identity. I was seen by some not as an ally but as an opponent. I was then an 'outsider' to some people, someone who was an active contributor to their economic marginalisation if and when the election succeeded. Quite paradoxically, my being an 'insider' in this case precipitated my branding as an 'outsider' in the eyes of other people. My experience highlights the fact that positional spaces do not just create trust and cooperation, they can also instantiate distrust and evasion. While other researchers (such as Mullings 1999; and, Burns et al. 2010) could choose to be either an 'insider' or an 'outsider' in a given context, my position was rather more constrained and limiting. I was already identified as a too much of an 'insider'. The people knew my political pedigree and where my political sympathies lay. Being an 'insider', this

time, complicated things and led to the closing of doors to a number of research participants.

7.4 I will cite one example, amongst many. Adela was a reliable and very important research participant in the first two months of my research. She was a grade school classmate of mine and in my first weeks in the community she was my most avid and vocal supporter in the research. She took the initiative of finding more research participants who were willing to share time with me. Days later, after the public gathering that I attended took place, I chanced upon her in a store buying some groceries. Although she was friendly, she was not the usual effusive and talkative Adela that I knew. When I asked her if she could come with me to an interview with a relative of hers, she declined. Sensing that something was wrong, I walked with her to her place. Before I could ask her if I did something wrong, she told me in a quivering voice:

If my mayor gets unseated and yours elected, my husband will lose his job in the municipal government and we will go hungry.

7.5 I felt like I was hit hard by something. I stopped in my tracks. She went on walking. The world went by while I pondered over what to do next. I decided to go home early. Since then, whenever our paths crossed, while we were very civil with one another, she would always find ways to avoid my eyes. I was never able to speak to her again.

7.6 In this brief encounter between myself and Adela, she had positioned me as an 'outsider' in the context of her family's economic survival, someone who is different from them. This echoes the experience, although in a different context, of Fournillier (2010) who found herself being 'othered' by a fellow Trinidadian when she spoke of doing a PhD on mask-making practices in the country after some years of studying overseas. Analysing Adela's reaction I could see that I did not belong to her community. My community affiliation was different from hers, even though we had shared the same space of interaction every day. The loss of rapport and, consequently, the failure to gain access from research participants was a testament to the fact that, as Savvakis and Tzanakis observed, 'the social world is always an ambivalent and ambiguous universe that holds well-hidden petit secrets, which are not exposed to the researcher without personal involvement' (2004, p. 1.13 cited in Collins (1998). The opening up of a positional space merited both the deepening and severance of ties with people in the field. Research participants construed my participation in the political drama differently as much as the impact of my participation would have varying effects on their socio-economic survival. Ganga and Scott put a finger on the issue when they aver that:

Our insider status can make us accepted within the group, but it can also affect the way in which others perceive us within this relatively close social world. (2006, p. 3)

7.7 Researchers will always have an effect on the setting and the people they are studying since they have their own knowledge about these and data collection may be modified by their presence (Ahmed et al. 2010, p. 468). As my political affiliation was highlighted, people saw me in different ways and this orchestrated a plethora of calibration of their responses in my presence. Many people became more open and engaging while others turned hostile and unwelcoming.

Discussion

8.1 An 'insider' researcher's status is of time and space. Although I readily perceived my status as an 'insider' when I first thought of doing research in this community, my actual field experience reveals a more complex reality. People in communities subscribe to different affiliations and harbour a plethora of identities and affiliations, much like researchers do. This makes 'insider' research an exercise of constant negotiation of one's perceived 'insiderness'.

8.2 It is in this context that researchers have to pay attention to 'how their own shifting positionalities impact the research process and to demonstrate an awareness of the multiple ways in which their social identities intersect with this processes' (Cupples and Kindon 2003, p. 212). While it is said that aligning one's attributes to those of the informants provides better access (see, for example, Chacko 2004), who can predict the future when in the field? Key moments in the life of the community have to be attended to in order for researchers to gauge the ways in which to secure a more intimate look at what is happening on the ground. In my case, my involvement in the election became a key moment in my fieldwork life, provided a positional space, and strengthened my 'insider' position in the community.

8.3 Inevitably, as someone who also had a personal stake in the on-going political drama in the town, I had to decide which side I was on (Becker 1967). I simply could not remain sitting on the fence. My role as a researcher did not erase my identity as a native of the place. When I was identified to be supporting the unseating of the incumbent mayor, my 'insider' status became firmly intertwined with the fate of the community. This made me a homecoming local, not just someone doing research in the community but someone who was with the community. I was sharing the same fate with a large majority of people in the community, feeling for their struggle, and no longer a detached observer safely ensconced in my academic tower. However, taking sides meant that I also became in some sectors of the community an 'outsider' to their collective fate. I became an 'insider' experiencing the pains of being an 'outsider' to other people's universe. It follows that certain kinds of access and rapport are impossible when the field researchers' roles are limited by the norms surrounding their particular status group memberships (Mazzei and O'Brien 2009, p. 362).

8.4 The changing (and changed) nature of my membership reflects the community's dynamic constitution, its enrolment in a much wider world of continuing changes and changing continuities. The community is in a sense a contingent window into complexity (Candea 2007). The community that I studied was not a

homogenous and static community; it was a community enrolled in what Hudson (2001) calls a time-space envelope:

There may well be a continuum of places, exhibiting varying degrees of openness and closure, continuity and discontinuity, internal homogeneity and heterogeneity [my emphasis]. Irrespective of how their geometry is conceptualized, places must not only be defined in terms of their spatial location and attributes but also in terms of their location in time [my emphasis]. (Hudson 2001, p. 258)

8.5 It was not a community of people who shared the same political sentiments. Things had changed in the community since I had left it. The support for my politician friend had waned amongst the people in the community compared to the last time I was there. Although he still commanded support amongst a large majority, those people who were against him and his family had also grown in number. This eluded my grasp. The fishing community was a changing community just like any other community. It was a community of clashing interests, divergent opinions, and protracted ways of living. Any community, therefore, is a space of contradictions, oppositional views and interests (Cohen 1985). A community thrives precisely because of the inherent contrapuntal forces that energise and prod every member to action.

8.6 The fishing community that I went back to was not the same community that I had left. When a new mayor was elected many people in the community had shifted political allegiances for economic reasons. They were employed and given financial help in otherwise testing economic times in the community. Although this had clearly happened before people of different political persuasions lived in the community, that was a different time and my membership then was not yet inclusive of my new role as an 'insider' researcher. My status as an 'insider' researcher in the context of the prevailing political turmoil in the community created a new reality for me and for the people that I studied. When I stepped into the community to do research, a new set of power relations was inaugurated and when my involvement in the election was made visible then there was a re-working of power and research relations in the field. As Subedi (2006) observes, reiterating Delgado-Gaitan's (1993) assertion, 'there is a need to critique assumed notions of community since sharing the same (ethnic) background as the participants does not necessarily make the researcher more knowledgeable about the meanings of the participants' feelings, values and practices' (2006, p. 579).

8.7 When the petition for the election set in, it also precipitated a re-thinking of some people of their relationship with other people including myself. Positional spaces opened up. It is no wonder that when some of my relations with my research participants turned sour, I was also told that due to the election, relations within the community itself were also strained. Thus, my fate was no different from that of others in the community. The changing and changed boundaries of my 'insider' status coincided with the changing contours of relations in the community. My supposed kinship, real or otherwise, with my research participants was sidelined by the political turn of events in the community and was rendered useless by my newly acquired identity status; that is, as someone occupying the other side of the fence, a threat to other people's economic survival.

8.8 Obviously, research of whatever epistemological persuasion is done to understand society and effect change if needed. It is also in this context that on the ground the people being studied have reason to evade cooperation if they feel that the research topic itself or the researcher poses a threat to their well-being, or indeed, will change their lives for the worse (Wood 2006). While it is assumed that research ethics tells us that researchers should always put the welfare of research subjects at the forefront (AAA 1998; BSA 2002), complex realities on the ground make this rather simple research doxa a more conflicted affair than first imagined. In my case, my support of election buoyed up the spirits of the people in the community who felt maligned and disenfranchised by the incumbent local political leadership. On the other hand, I also became complicit to a possible economic disenfranchisement of some people in the community who had all to lose and nothing to gain if the recall election pushed through and a new mayor was elected. Clearly, while on my own, I could not possibly affect the eventual outcome of the election, my support as a homecoming native of considerable social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1989, 2000) was a triumph for the people in the community supporting it. My support of the campaign to oust the incumbent mayor threatened further the economic well-being of some people in the community and it is in this sense that I betrayed some people's trust while affirming that of others. Although I could have held my peace and expressed neutrality by disavowing any intent to take a side, I exercised my agency by choosing to take sides, and when I was exposed I took advantage since it augured well for my research project. It could well be called opportunism but I had to choose whose side I was on and I made my decision on the basis of what I knew was right and true to my own personal political conviction. Having said that, I felt sorry though for the likes of Adela who felt betrayed and endangered by the choice that I had made.

8.9 Obviously, there are limits to the supposed methodological advantages that an 'insider' researcher possesses in the field but at the same time there are some experiences that could only be had within the gambit of an 'insider' position. If I chose to study a different setting with the same prevailing political tension going on then I would not have experienced the same insights and heartaches accorded to me by my intimate membership in the community. Being an 'insider', therefore, presents a plethora of advantages and disadvantages, not to mention the complexities that it adds to the research experience. Denscombe (1998) explains that 'insiders' are constrained by a web of meanings and, clearly, this also includes how my political biography is ingrained in the memory of my research participants. Thus, if I was perceived as an 'outsider' or as an 'insider' was limited to certain status attributes only (like being Filipino) then I would have had a much different reception in the latter part of my fieldwork. Dealing with positional spaces in the field would not have been that complicated, at times frustrating and disheartening, but ultimately rich and far more rewarding than I expected.

Conclusion

9.1 In this paper, I have attempted to outline the inherently tenuous, shifting and malleable identity of an 'insider' researcher and the complications surrounding issues of access and rapport, especially in a small, tightly knit community such as this fishing community in the Philippines. I have attempted to demonstrate the utter complexity and profundity of taking a specific positionality in the field and have described the attendant epistemological issues that arise with the evolving nature of one's membership in a place of continuing changes and changing continuities. By using Mullings' (1999) positional spaces, I made concrete the assumption that there is no Archimedean point from which a researcher can claim an unchanging status in the field. By detailing my own experience, I showed how my political biography, as it was perceived and known by my research participants, reconfigured my access to and rapport with the people in the community. When I took advantage of a positional space, that is of someone identified with the campaign to unseat an incumbent mayor, and used it to further my affiliation and commonality with my research participants, it also severed a number of ties with other people in the community. In so doing, I re-affirmed the trust of others and at the same time, breached the trust of others. As a result, access to people and information was both widened and constrained. Rapport was also both deepened and constrained.

9.2 Doing the same study in a different fishing community might present a considerably different set of challenges and opportunities. Stepping into a strange environment where everyone and everything is unfamiliar and seemingly inscrutable means that the epistemology of doing research concerning a community that negotiates its by-ways in the push and pull of both a localised and globalised world will result in a different field dilemmas that are as complicated and as challenging as those presented in this study. The field, therefore, is never singular and it is up to the researcher to discover its plural self. It is worth noting then how the singular self of the researcher provides a contingent window into the complexity of the world (Candea 1997).

9.3 The importance of this article lies in three things. Firstly, it lends support by way of an empirical example to the claim made by previous studies that the 'fluidity of in/out positionality' (Soni-Sinha 2008) means that our positionality in the field is never fixed and is always a project-in-progress. Secondly, this article highlights the importance of taking into account and furthering the discussion concerning the salience of positional spaces, our contact and contract zones, in securing while at the same time losing access and rapport with research participants in the field. And finally, since anything personal is also political, the study suggests in the most vivid way possible that the field is far more than a set of intellectual pursuits, it also has a political context (Knowles 2000, p. 56) which is inseparable from and intertwined with the personal life of the researcher. This then makes every fieldwork an opportunity to uncover the many possibilities to research that an unpredictable and changing people, places, and context present.

9.4 One of the eminent methodological concerns which this paper did not consider was familiarity, a very obvious feature of the field given the nature of my membership in the community that was being studied. Possible research themes include how my presumed 'insider' position posed a challenge in making sense of data since working in a familiar territory could 'render findings overshadowed by the enclosed, self-contained world of common understanding' (Mannay 2010, p. 94). I could also have considered my position as an 'outsider' as a mitigating factor in fighting familiarity (Delamont and Atkinson 1995). A further research theme includes the everyday field tactics that would allow a substantial cognitive distancing of myself from my familiar setting. These are some of the concerns raised by this article which can inform the work of other researchers who are in the same subject-position and who are in a related, if not the same, spatial economic and political context.

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