DECOLONISING THE RESEARCHER'S MIND ABOUT SOUTHERN RESEARCH: REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD

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November 2011

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Doria Daniels was born and grew up in the Strand, in the Boland. She attended Strand Moslem Primary School and matriculated from Gordon High School in Somerset West. From 1977 to 1980 she studied full time at the University of the Western Cape, where she obtained her BA degree and HDE. Whilst being a high school teacher she studied part time towards her B Ed degree, which she was awarded in 1984. In 1988 she decided to pursue an MA degree in Instructional Design and Technology at the University of Iowa in the USA. In 1996 she completed a PhD in International and Intercultural Education at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, USA.

From 1997 to 2000 she was a member of the Department of Curriculum Studies in the Faculty of Education at Rand Afrikaans University, now the University of Johannesburg. In 2001 she accepted an appointment at Stellenbosch University as Director of Community Services, a position that she held for two years. She returned to academia in 2003 when she joined the Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University as an associate professor. In 2011 she was promoted to a full professor. She has a C-3 rating as researcher from the National Research Foundation.

Her research and scholarship are in the areas of visual-based inquiry, women's access to education, non-formal education, gender, and community education. Her scholarly accomplishments include a scholarship from the University of Iowa for her MA degree, a scholarship for PhD studies from the Institute of International Education, and a Cyril O Houle Fellowship in Adult and Continued Education from the Kellogg Foundation. She is currently the regional editor for Africa for QSE, *The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education.*

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INTRODUCTION*

Researchers often fail to recognise that multiple discourses intersect the research context and that their own discourses are part of those that influence the truths that are created in research inquiries. Reflexivity exercised by researchers opens up a space to problematise how education and training through "western ethnocentric, patriarchal and capitalistic methods and epistemologies" (Saavedra, Chakravarthi & Lower, 2009) influence research in the global periphery. In this address I raise issues that could develop from colonial relations with research, such as the queries about knowledge production, representation, language and history (Dei, 2000). Postmodernists have criticised western science for being an accomplice of the Eurocentric hegemony that excludes alternative voices and methodologies. Some, like Foucault (1970), have tried to put in place a counter-science (Lather, 2006) of consistent reflexive acts of undoing and recomposing the researcher stance and practices. This address is meant to engender a space where a variety of critical lenses are interwoven to problematise notions of research truths as they exist in South African research contexts.

The generation of scientific knowledge through research is not the clear-cut, straightforward process that positivist science wants it to be. Rather, it is a messy process of digging for truths in the maze of stereotypes, myths and fabrications that surround the lives of the researched. At least, that is my experience in the more than twelve years that I have been engaging with qualitative research in South Africa. Having found the research paradigms that shape social science to not be democratic or inclusive enough to capture human experiences has fed my curiosity about how, what and by whom scientific knowledge is produced, and the validity of such knowledge. In our worlds, scientists wield power and their findings influence national decisions that impact on people's lives. Critical reflexivity about our research orientations and the scientific knowledge that our research contributes should become a crucial part of the research endeavour. The thesis of my address today is to problematise the development of southern scholarship against the backdrop of a universally valid knowledge. I believe that the vulnerable peripheral contexts that some Southern researchers work in contain domains of knowledge that traditional western methodologies and methods do not capture adequately. In this address my use of the term *southern* does not refer to geographical location only; it includes any research context that does not fit the hegemonic context. So too, my use of the term *colonial* is not confined to the understanding of it as foreign and western; it includes ethnocentric, imposing and dominating research (Dei 2000). I will start with the challenges that southern African researchers face in the global era and advance the argument that, unless researchers of the south position themselves as archaeologists who excavate research contexts (Saavedra *et al.*, 2009), their epistemological contribution to knowledge will be minimal. In the second part of the address I introduce visual-based inquiry and explain how I have used it as a research and pedagogical tool in studies that I have undertaken or been involved in to start uncovering subjugated knowledge about peripheral research populations.

It is not possible to talk about scientific knowledge without talking about the power wielded by the positivist paradigm. Positivist science is probably one of modernity's greatest achievements. When scientists claimed that the social world contained one inherent truth that could be discovered by examining the regularities in that world (Hatch, 2006), it defined how the academic world would come to think about what knowledge is and how it should be legitimised. It positioned quantitative research as the academically authorised view and science as the legitimate vehicle for knowledge generation. Only specific forms of knowledge, notably those that are measurable (Cannella, 2004), were validated. So too, only one specific stance for the researcher was legitimised, namely that the investigator had to study a phenomenon without influencing it or being influenced by it; a process that Guba and Lincoln (1994:110) describe as "inquiry (that) takes place as through a one way mirror". Neo-positivist empiricism ruled that a subjective positioning of the researcher would compromise the rules of scientific data collection. Through the endorsement of a deterministic way of viewing knowledge and the world, a dominant discourse was established within research that came to undermine all other ways in which researchers reflect on their knowledge and the world. The righteous grandstanding of science as a superior way of knowing and understanding human experience turned scientists

into power brokers of knowledge. Foucault (1980) used the term *regime of truth* to refer to the power-constituted legitimation of the knowledge of the dominant forces that disqualify all other knowledges and rationalities as inadequate (Avgerou & McGrath, 2007). In our time we have experienced how the power that scientists have over objectified research populations allowed scientific rationales that "justify the radicalized and nativistic purposes of eugenics and intelligence testing" (Stanfield, 2006) to go unchallenged. So too, because the Tuskegee trials on syphilis happened in the name of scientific research, the unethical act by which the dignity of human beings was sacrificed for scientific gain was considered to be justified.

It is only in the last three decades that a post-positivist wave of researchers started challenging and achieving limited success in dislodging dominant domains of knowledge (Foucault, 1980). Social scientists have challenged the deterministic way in which a social world that is complex and filled with contradictions is viewed by scientists. So, too, constructivist epistemologies have shown that all scientific knowledge is culturally embedded and perspectival. Thus research knowledge is shaped by the situatedness of the research subject as well as the locatedness of the researcher (Haraway, 1991; Stanley & Wise, 1993). Regardless of what the tools of reliability and validity in our research designs enable us to say, who we are impacts on what we see, what we collect and how we analyse. One needs to accept that human interactions in research contexts will influence scientific knowledge. Researchers and the object of study are interactively linked, so that findings are mutually created within the context of the situation that shapes the inquiry (Denzin, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). My epistemological stance is that the knower is situated in particular relations to others and to what is known. Thus, what is known, and the way that it is known, reflect the situation or perspective of the knower. Although qualitative research has led to an ontological shift in how subjective realities are studied, its progress as a respected form of human inquiry has been slow.

Hatch (2006) has argued that the postmodern turn might have indirectly contributed to the scarcity of excellent qualitative studies in education, in that the powerful ideas of postmodern thought and the propensity to deconstruct and critique has shifted the focus from doing research to theorising, teaching and writing about qualitative research and its issues. This seems to be the case for our contexts too. The qualitative space remains occupied by the traditional quasi-positivist preoccupations with collecting, coding, analysing and reporting. Furthermore, understandings of scientific respectability remain tied to "the superior virtues of positivist reasoning" (Stanfield, 2006), which makes it difficult to break free from dominant knowledge production modes. Whilst this is the norm, any research findings that do not stem from research done in the traditional mould are rendered suspect. Furthermore, it also discourages researchers from venturing beyond the traditional methods of interviewing and observation, even when they know these methods to be limiting or inadequate in the research contexts they access. This is the background against which many researchers from the southern hemisphere, but also those cross-cultural researchers who find themselves marginalised by western ethnocentric discourses, are carving out their place in research.

THE CHALLENGES FACING THE SOUTHERN RESEARCHER

The era of globalised networks is delivering many challenges to the South African researcher's positioning as a global researcher. In her book, *Southern Theory*, Raewyn Connell (2007) describes the mainstream ideas and frameworks of the social sciences as viewpoints of the global North that are masquerading as universal truths. She points out the danger of only such viewpoints shaping the ways in which social science operates in the global periphery. My point is that complacency with the research space allows the ambiguities and complexities of marginal contexts to be concealed and even obliterated. The higher education research context is rife with underlying tensions linked to power relations within research, between researchers and the researched, as well as amongst researchers from the three world divisions. I see power in research not just as the ability to enforce your will as a researcher on design and methodology. It involves a wide range of influences (Wong, 2002), such as the capitalistic nature of research markets (Hountondji, 1992; Mignolo, 2009), south-north institutional links (Smith, 1999; Lincoln & González y González, 2008; Mignolo, 2009) and the power that world languages such as English or French continue to bring to bear on African scholarship (Thiong'o, 1986; Hountondji, 1992). In this section I identify four challenges that could be hampering the quality of the southern researcher's contribution to scientific knowledge.

The first challenge that southern researchers face is how to navigate education's engagement with research as a capitalistic endeavour. The discursive impact of capitalism on the workings of the university and the

research positioning of academics is seldom talked about, even though the network of capitalistic relations is clear in researcher-researched contexts. In higher education, research has been pitched as a capitalistic endeavour in which the focus is placed on the profit value of research outputs for institutional advancement. It thus is not surprising to find researchers positioned as the CEOs of their research projects and research subjects as the producers of profit through the information that they produce. The value of research subjects is determined by the commodities (data) that they produce, with the profit value of those commodities being determined by their goodness of fit in the global research markets. I believe the unbalanced focus on capital gain from research has happened to the detriment of quality indigenous research, as the goodness of fit of southern research is not based on the scientific contribution it is making; rather, it is determined by the quantity of outputs, and their saleability to global markets.

A second challenge is the language of research, which favours the western researcher. Even in post-colonial times, the covert expectation is that scholars use a world language such as English to disseminate their findings, and to make their research contribution in. The suggestive power of language should not be underestimated; nor its dual character as a means of communication and as a carrier of culture. Hountondji (1992) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) are two African scholars who have written extensively about the scientific and scholarly dependency that African scholars have developed on northern research because of the monopoly of the world language. For Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), being taught in English made learning for him a cerebral activity, rather than an emotionally felt experience. Similar to how Foucault has argued that regimes of truth could lead to other truths becoming subjugated knowledges, the monopoly of English in research has resulted in indigenous languages being relegated to being unsuited as research languages. This monopoly has implications for what scholars have available to them to help shape their theoretical and conceptual frameworks. In a time when southern researchers are vying for epistemological legitimacy and reducing their dependency on northern scholarship, their efforts are hampered by barriers within their own environments. They are discouraged from publishing in indigenous languages because of a fear of being side-lined by the mainstream southern publishers. A sifting mechanism for most local scientific journals has been language, arguably more than the quality of the research and its potential to contribute to global debates.

Tied to this challenge is the embeddedness of the southern researcher in western paradigms that are encoded with authoritative depictions of peripheral research communities (Smith, 1999; Daniels, 2003; 2010). I draw from the work of Minnich (1990) and Connell (2007) when I state that the default assumptions we hold about research have been shaped by northern theories and literature. When only northern literature shapes our theoretical and methodological frameworks, it places limitations on what can be known about the researched subjects in cross-cultural contexts. Furthermore, the designs that are framed by such northern or western perspectives could restrict the researcher's view of the true research problems (Sparks, 1997) in southern contexts such as ours, and potentially could lead to misrepresentation of research subjects. Reliance on this partial and so-called objective knowledge to frame the research could be at the expense of silencing voices and submerging data. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) describes such research as being viewed through imperial eyes. At the same time, observer representations of indigenous peoples under a western paradigm tend to be encoded as an authoritative representation of the research subject. She cautions that the end product could become a representation of the colonised subject's world as mirrored in the text-based writing of his researcher.

A final challenge to southern research that I want to highlight is the proliferation of Southern African-Northern institutional collaborations. Although marketed as educational opportunities, and encouraged by our institutions, there is the possibility that such collaborations could inhibit the indigenous researcher's knowledge, as well as subjugate the southern contribution. My concern is about the role of the southern researcher in such collaborations, and on whom the ownership of such research is bestowed. In some potential collaborations that I have considered, the research designs were already finalised and all they needed was a southern research location. I consider it to be a challenge when southern researchers have limited decision-making powers about methodological issues in projects that are undertaken in contexts with challenges that we understand best. Mignolo (2009) talks about the geo- and body-politics of knowledge in research. According to Mignolo, where you as a researcher are from and who you are determines what you are allowed to deliver on. He posits that the geo-positioning of the northern researcher is as someone who is theoretically minded, while the southern researcher is positioned as culturally minded. Thus, even when scientific labour is distributed globally, claims of epistemological ownership

are reserved for researchers from the northern section. This leads Mignolo to propose changing the content, as well as the terms, of the research conversation in such a way that it takes away the epistemic privilege of the northern researcher. So too, Hountondji (1992) proposes that southern researchers see their scientific contribution as stretching beyond data production to becoming the epistemic owners of such research.

SEARCHING FOR EMERGING DECOLONISED METHODOLOGIES

The call by postmodernists for reflexivity about the research process, and for researchers to account for their contexts of knowledge production, is a call that I take seriously as a feminist researcher. As a qualitative researcher of the south, the challenges embedded in cross-cultural research have encouraged me to start decolonising my *being* (Hountondji, 1992; Chatterjee, 1998; Smith, 1999; Mignolo, 2009). This is the process of reflexivity about my stance, background and position in life as a researcher and their influences on the research context and on the data that is produced. Breines (2002) has argued that one's feminist epistemology is grounded in personal experiences of how race, ethnicity, class, nationality and religion can become sites of the gender struggle. What reflexivity has alerted me to in gender research is that women's oppression does not stem from sexism only; racism and the political disempowerment of being classified non-white are part of a black woman's oppression. Reflexivity has also made me take stock of my privileged position as a researcher, as well as my limitations as an outsider. It has heightened my awareness that I enter the research site with partial knowledge (Minnich, 1990) that is shaped by the literature and my own individual lived experiences.

One needs to acknowledge that educational research in ex-colonial regions is likely to be dependent on and considered secondary to research in northern regions. We, the researchers personify the colonised attitude. A critical stance has to be to seek a decolonising option in each particular and local history by adopting what Mignolo calls the epistemic disobedience of the researcher, and what I call epistemic transformation. I describe the research I do as one of "practicing research as an African scholar", rather than researching the African subject. This positioning requires mindfulness about one's influence as researcher and this discourse creates the space for me to engage with the research environment as a proactive contributor of epistemological knowledge. The research that I do is with communities that could be considered marginalised because of their race, gender, age or class. I grapple with the question of whether the researcher can speak for economically and linguistically marginalised groups if she does not belong to those groups. England (1994) and others have pointed out that researchers can never fully know and understand the positions and experiences of the researched. This makes it important then for researchers to not deny the presence of our academic editorship in our representations of those whom we research.

I have come to recognise that the contexts that I do research in require more creative ways of engaging with research subjects. I have also realised that language as the communicative tool (spoken and written) in research obstructs the researcher's gaze of the subject and her world. Most South African research communities have English and Afrikaans as their third or fourth languages. When thinking about the challenges of doing research I am drawn to Foucault's work (1970), and his centring of the concepts of discourse and power. Discourses are means by which power is exerted. One of Foucault's intellectual concerns is scholarship that reveals how certain individuals or topics are excluded from discourses by those who have control over those discourses. The research designs and methodologies we choose can become means by which we include the research subjects and introduce peripheral discourses to the debate on scientific knowledge.

I will next introduce visual-based methods as one possible way of giving voice to research subjects despite the barriers of language, age, ethnicity and ability. When I researched the understanding that women in informal settlements had of community building and leadership, they told their stories through the photos they took, through drawings and by role-playing their challenges. Photographs served as elaborators of verbal dialogue and became rich sources of data on their innermost feelings about community. By using photography as a research tool, access was gained to the world of the subjects in a much more personal way, without personal invasion of their privacy. As a pedagogical tool, the photos initiated many discussions on life in the settlement, specifically women's roles in keeping the community functional. This medium encouraged collaborative inquiry because the social space of the workshop encouraged the women to explore the challenges they faced, as well as allowed for additional strands to be explored in finer detail.

STUDY 1

The example I use here comes from research that I conducted from 1998 to 2001 in the informal settlement of Majazani[1] on women as community builders and leaders. The process of studying the lives of dynamic community women who were functioning in an informal South African setting was a daunting task. I faced many challenges: my positioning as an educated black woman researching poor, black, non-literate women's lived experiences, being of a different cultural and ethnic group, and not sharing a mother tongue with the researched. Feminists and critical theorists (hooks, 1984; Horsman, 1990; Freire, 1992; Giroux, 1992; Zambrana, 1994) have advocated for both the recognition of these differences as well as for the recognition of the significance of these differences.

In the first year of the research I, together with two graduate students,[2] spent two days per week for six months orientating ourselves to the settlement by visiting the school, observing in the community and getting to know strategic women in the community. Only when we got a sense of people being comfortable with us did we set up interviews to record women's stories about community and leadership. Through their narratives, the participants could give meaning and visibility to the lives of the Majazani women. As stories are interpretive and dialogical, they have the potential to make insiders and outsiders of a community see things in a new and different way. Although we collected their stories, our increasing knowledge of the community's women during the course of the year pointed to gaps in their stories. Niggling questions were surfacing about the truthfulness of the representations of the women's worlds. Educational research is recognised for its authoritative research processes (Clifford, 1988; Rosaldo, 1993) and for the absence of the participant voice. As Lassiter (2001) points out, the issues of power and the politics of representation remain problematic. From a qualitative interpretative paradigm, meaning making is based on how reality is interpreted. My growing knowledge of the community that year validated my concern that layers of important life events and experiences were not being captured through our observations and interviews. I started questioning the validity of the data that I had collected up to that point. I started questioning the "truths" that I had collected on these women.

I wondered what would happen when the women were given the freedom to reflect their worlds in images that they took themselves. I decided then to explore photography as a data collection method and pedagogical tool. Each participant was equipped with a disposable camera to visually record any aspects of her daily life activities that she wanted to disclose. My justification for using photography was that this method is not dependent on a shared language, neither is it dependent on the presence of the researcher. Photographs can be used as bridges of communication between strangers and have the potential to become pathways to unfamiliar, unforeseen environments (Collier & Collier, 1986). Furthermore, I saw it as useful for triangulation purposes to validate interview and observational data and to strengthen the inquiry. A series of three workshops were held during which the photographs were used as a pedagogical tool to engage the same group of women in a critical discussion of challenges to leadership and community as experienced by women from this impoverished community.

Windows onto the soul

It is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words, that an image can convey expression in a way that makes visible the invisible (Daniels, 2006). Betensky (1995) describes pictures as visual evidence of a participant's capacity for self-expression and creativity, something that Rogers (1997) refers to as "the language of feeling". The 27 photographs that Mrs George took only contained images of children and a funeral. This visual-based data confirmed some of the text-based data from the interviews about her life: she was a single, unemployed mother of nine children. Three children were biologically hers, four were "inherited" when one of her sisters died, and another two were left in her care when a second sister died.

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[1]   This is not the official name of the community.

[2]   Angela Mamiane and Marie Malaka were two graduate students who worked as research assistants on the project.

Above are the three photos that Mrs George selected: one depicting a dirty boy, the second showing her washing the boy, and the third a funeral scene. The boy in two of the three photos is not one of her nine children, even though he appeared in most of the photos that she took of the children. She introduced him as a child with a physical disability that she had found wandering in the alleys of the informal settlement. When she could not locate his parents she took him home with her. She fed and sheltered him for three months before his relatives came to claim him. He featured on quite a few of her photos with her daughter, who also has a disability. Mrs George used these photos to talk about child abandonment in her community. As a political activist, Mrs George was recognisable in her call to action of the community.

Feminist researchers such as Long (1999) and Collins (1994) have found that the personal narratives of women provide portraits of gender arrangements that are invisible in the dominant discourse. In other research (Daniels, 2003, 2010), I have argued that the narrative is part of a constructive process in which disempowered individuals are able to examine, interpret and reconceptualise their experiences by means of the stories they tell. Involving participants as analysts of their own data is a fusion of research and pedagogy that narrows the distance between the researcher and the researched subjects. In the Freirian application of praxis (Freire, 1992), which is the process of reflection and action, data becomes mechanisms of access to the research population's reality and is used to assist them in making sense of their own world. The visual depictions of their realities could instigate critical discussion and facilitate a process of conscientization. In another publication I describe how, visual-based methods such as photos and drawings can be used as tools to scaffold participants' stories (Daniels, 2003).

The interviews and observations were instrumental in introducing us to Mrs George's world in a somewhat superficial way, in other words, an incomplete narrative.

What the visual data did was to illuminate related issues that she and other women in the community face, but which the researcher did not necessarily focus on. The issues she raised gave us additional lenses through which to view her life. We saw a humanitarian who had the capacity to take a helpless child off the streets, despite her very difficult circumstances at home. This single mother was struggling to make ends meet, yet she was willing to share her minimal resources to feed a tenth child for three months. The third photo was taken at her sister's funeral. She used the photo to speak about the goodwill that exists in her community in times of crisis. Through the third photograph she gave us insight into informal social support networks that women create to assist one another in times of need. She acknowledged the people surrounding her sister's coffin as members of her community who provided financial assistance so that she could afford a dignified burial for her sister. They also provided transportation to the funeral. She used these three photos to explain to us her understanding of the role that women play in community building. This opportunity to record her reality and to talk about her family, children and her sister's death gave us insights into her less public roles of mother, caregiver and household head.

Sparks (1997) quotes De Vault as saying that researchers should listen "around and beyond words". When visual-based methods such as photographs, drawings, videos and collages are used with the necessary permission of and collaboration by participants, they can provide researchers with access to very private domains that the researcher cannot see in interviews. I found the images that the participants created to be more effective than the spoken language for decoding the multi-layered worlds of those participants, especially when their vocabulary in English was limited or when they were not very articulate. In this study, the personal photograph became an excellent tool for participants to use when telling their stories and sharing their experiences. What this example also demonstrates is how different methods and negotiations in discourse can bring different truths

to the fore. As Foucault would say, truth is not given and stable; it is fluid (Foucault, 1980). In Mrs George's case, the truths about her were shaped by the interview data and the community contexts of the time. That truth was tied to her public persona as a political activist and an ANC leader, whose name frequently featured in the narratives of others and who was described as "ruthless" and "callous". It was a volatile year, interspersed with episodes of unrest; she was at the centre of spates of violence in the community. Interviews and observations as methods can harness valid data. However, the question whether valid data is the truth if the content of that data is influenced by the researcher's gaze only is brought to the fore when one takes the view that research informants can provide valid information for the pursuit of narrative depth.

STUDY 2

What do you see: me or a disability?

The second example I take from a study on the high school experiences of adolescents living with physical disabilities, which was undertaken by Erasmus in 2010 and supervised by myself. The literature on adolescents with physical disabilities mostly sketches disability as a tragedy for such individuals. Research on participants living with physical disabilities is overwhelmingly framed by that disability. In other words, the disability takes centre stage in the self-identity of the individual, or so the literature wants us to believe. Adolescence is a difficult development phase, as it is associated with both physical and emotional change in the individual. According to the literature it can be especially traumatic for the individual with the physical disability, as this is a stage when they are being confronted anew with their own views, as well as the views of others, on their potential as young adults. What we can learn from the literature is that, at some stage of their lives, all people living with a physical disability will internalise the continuous negative responses of others to their appearance, and this could lead to serious internal struggles about their physical appearance. Thus, studies that explore such individuals' stories about feelings of dissatisfaction with their bodies and expressions about their unattractiveness are common (Taleporos & McCabe, 2002; Potgieter & Khan (2005). The traditional methods of observation and interviewing allow for questions to be asked as influenced by the literature on disability.

Table 1: Information on disability

Participant	Origin of Disability	Level of disability	Living with the Disability	Interventions
Beckam	Accident with dart	Total blindness in one eye	11 years	Eye operations
Jonty	Birth	Feet misformed	15 years	Operations and physio
Geraldine	Birth	Hips misformed & underdeveloped leg muscles	18 years	Leg operations & phisio
J.Legend	Birth and stroke	Paralysis in arm and leg muscles. Speach defect	20 years	Operations, phisio and occupational therapy
Paris	Car accident	Paraplegic	1 year	Back and arm operations, physiotherapy, occupational therapy swim therapy
Charlize	Birth	Hips misformed	16 years	Operations, physio and occupational physio
Helen	Cancer in one leg	Amputaded leg below knee	1 year	Leg oparations and physiotherapy, occupational therapy

Textual representations of participants' realities have been criticised for the inherent power structures they propagate and for the ways in which they can appropriate the voices and stories of the participants (Denzin, 1994). The table above was compiled on the basis of interview data collected from the participants. What one typically ends up with is information about the researched as formed by the gaze of the researcher. My criticism about this type of knowledge is that it is an imposing knowledge, with an implementation that is authoritarian and epistemologically undemocratic. What I want to show next is what happens when the methodological power shifts to the participant, using collaging as a research method.

Erasmus (2011) merged social sciences with art in a form of qualitative inquiry that I call visual-based inquiry. He asked adolescents to create a collage that defined who they were as people. The seven participants had the freedom to use a variety of materials, such as clippings from magazines, photos, text and symbols, to create the collage, with the only limitation being a lack of imagination. Because people with disabilities could be marginalised by the stereotypes that researchers have about their abilities and capabilities, collages as data could give researchers valuable insights into the daily lives of adolescents. It is a user-friendly, non-threatening method that could be used to open up discussion about sensitive topics that young people might avoid talking to adults about. It also provides shy adolescents and those who are communicating in a second language or who do not have the necessary vocabulary with a tool to assist them in telling the more complete story. For this session they were asked to create a collage that told the researcher who they were in the world. Thereafter, each one presented his or her collage to the group and used it as a tool to talk about themselves. The collage below was done by Paris, a 17-year old participant in the study.

Paris is a grade 10 student. In her collage she describes her lifestyle as "outgoing", as she is a people's person who wants to participate in everything. She describes herself as "an adrenaline junkie". This is supported by the visual elements in her collage: fast cars, tango dancing, rock climbing. The impression she leaves is of someone who forces those around her to notice her. This impression is strengthened during the focus group session. Erasmus's personal notes talk about a diva personality who thrives on being the centre of attention. He experiences her as a very spontaneous teenager who talks easily and who exudes a confident sexuality. She is very aware of her beauty and her effect on males. During the session she openly flirted with the male participants.

At this point you might be thinking: So what? This is a description of a typical teenager. Not. If I can take you back to the observational and interview data. When one analyses that data, Paris is defined by her

(Reproduced with permission from Erasmus, 2011).

disability. Paris is a paraplegic. A car accident put her in a wheelchair, and the literature, with its deficit stance about disability, could frame the findings within this deficit model to present one truth about Paris. And that could become the truth about Paris to which people respond. Society has shared schemas, or beliefs, about the status of groups that are defined by gender, race, age or education. I want to argue that it is these widely-held beliefs that influence a research community's views of the competence, value and social significance of an individual living with a disability. The collage created a space within the research for the adolescent participants to present themselves on their own terms. The interview data would have made the researcher miss the agency within such individuals as participants. In this research design, the role of the researcher was not just to study the adolescent with a disability. It was to engage the adolescent body in knowledge making, which created an opportunity to decolonise the knowledge responsible for the colonisation of participant's like Paris's being.

The two cases that I presented here are examples of a methodology that shifts the geography of reasoning into the research subjects' world context, instead of into the theoretical scholarship on disability or community building. The power of the visual image is warranted over any other form of communication for its value to facilitate discussion, as well as to document and facilitate the analysis of social matters (Lykes 1997). I have demonstrated how visual research methods (Daniels, 2003) allow researchers to penetrate participants' worlds in ways that observations and interviews cannot. Participatory photography and collaging have pedagogical value in that they can initiate discussion and reflexivity about issues that are sometimes too difficult to talk about (Daniels, 2003; 2010). When visual-based research is conducted from a critical, participatory, action-based stance in relation to inquiry it can empower marginalised populations and can address social injustices. This is a dynamic, boundary-crossing way of making meaning in contextual realms. It is an attempt to create a transparent space in which the researcher is fair-minded about the biases and limitations embedded in the research environment about research subjects. For me they are examples of engagement with knowledge-making that advances the research cause. Like Mignolo (2009) and Smith (1999), I choose the decolonising option in research and use education to shift the geography of reason through my positioning, my engagement with the researched, and by introducing a creative methodology.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this presentation I have argued that research in the southern context could be a political act. The decisions that southern researchers make about research are not always informed by the challenges of their research contexts. Rather, they are informed by an understanding of universal truths that bind them to particular understandings of what valid knowledge is. I propose that southern researchers become critical consumers of global scholarship and engage with research in ways that make them the epistemological owners of such research.

In this address I provided 'snapshots' of visual-based inquiry as a qualitative methodology that provides opportunities for both researchers and the researched to make sense of their life worlds. My exploration of visual-based research methods stems from my discomfort with the truths of research findings and the unequal researcher-subject relationship. My endorsement of this methodology is based on its potential to represent participants in an equitable way and to help researchers move away from amputated research that dehumanises research participants. I want to conclude by responding to the epistemic objective of research. Research is a learning process from which a better understanding of one's world develops. As a southern researcher I claim it as a space for the human restoration of the researcher and the researched. In conclusion, I end with a quote from Foucault (in Davidson, 1997: 7):

… There is beneath that which science knows of itself something that it does not

know…. I have tried to extricate … the unconscious of knowledge…

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