

Identities and subjectivities in cross-cultural research

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Outline and purpose

- Identities, subjectivities and positionality
- Research context: cross-cultural research in the Philippines
- Autobiography and positionality: how who we are affects what we do
- Implications: destabilising Western researchers (and the West)?

Introduction

- How identities and subjectivities are negotiated and constituted in a cross-cultural context and implications for research
 - Fieldwork in the Philippines
- Research influences, approach
 - Human geographical research into environment-development drawing on critical and methodologies and utilising multiple qualitative methods.
 - Situated and partial knowledge
 - Critical reflexivity

Identities, subjectivities and positionality

- Reflexivity "... self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher" (England, 1994: 82)
 - Linked to notions of subjectivity and positionality i.e. how our identities are constituted and negotiated by ourselves and others; and the implications of this on our interactions with research participants and the production of knowledge.

Identities, subjectivities and positionality

- “Our identities are constituted across a range of different discourses, often competing and inconsistent, and constructed not just by us, but for us” (Pini 2004: 171)
 - Contribution by feminist researchers whereby researchers are shown to occupy multiple subject positions and research as performative (Pini 2004).
 - i.e. we take on different ‘roles’ during the research, in relation to our research participants and others

Identities, subjectivities and positionality

- Post-fieldwork: methodology, positionality, subjectivity
 - Geography: Challenges by feminists to dominance of Western male voice in geographic research
 - Development studies: ‘native’ researchers returning to home country; experiences of non-Western researchers conducting research in other developing countries
 - Assumptions about who ‘we’ (Western) researchers are
 - Who we are affects the work we do (Cook et al 2005) but ‘we’ in are not all the same;
 - Significance in terms of thinking through how people respond to those who challenge conceptions of (white) Western researcher

Research context: the Philippines

- Multiple field trips since 1997 to Tagbilaran City
 1. Masters research and fieldwork – 1997 (6 weeks)
 - “Participation in a Privatised Development Project in the Philippines”
 - *I discovered I was ‘white’ on this trip*
 2. Pre-PhD scoping trip – 2001 (2 weeks)
 3. PhD fieldwork – 2003 (6 months) 2004 (6 months)
 - “Meeting Urban Water Needs: Exploring Water Governance and Development in the Philippines”
 - *My status as ‘white’ began to transform*
 4. UoA FRDF – 2009-2010 (9 weeks)
 - “Water security, climate change and development”
 - *Transformation to ‘white’ professional*







Research context: the Philippines

- “Why are you not as white as the other(s) [Americans]?”
 - Observations about my skin colour – not as white (colour) as other ‘Americans’
 - Similar (desirable) colouration of *mestiza* (mixed ethnicity) and a ‘long nose’

Research context: the Philippines

- In general, non-Filipinos regarded as American; an experience shared by other 'foreigners'
 - “Dili ko Americana. Taga New Zealand ko.”
 - “Dili ko Americano” t-shirts
 - Calls of “Americana/Americano”, “Hey Joe”
 - “Where in the US is NZ (Australia, UK)”?
- Exceptions: where people had experiences with non-American foreigners
 - OFW (e.g. Canada); tourists to the city (e.g. Samoan/Mexican tourists); travel elsewhere in the Philippines

Autobiography and positionality

- Acknowledgement of significance of biography as it relates to positionality
 - “A researcher is positioned by her/his gender, age, “race”/ethnicity, sexual identity, and so on, as well as by her/his biography ...” (England 1994: 85).
- Autobiography as a methodological and analytical tool in geography
 - Saltmarsh (2001) autobiographical account of transforming from a working class coal miner’s daughter to university student, to PhD candidate

Autobiography and positionality

- A postcolonial whakapapa
 - ‘White’ - British (English, Scottish, Irish), Swedish, French
 - Māori – Waikato/Tainui (Ngāti Mahuta); Ngāti Maniapoto (Ngāti Pare te Kawa)
 - Referents: self-identified and ascribed
 - NZ Māori/NZ Pākehā; “half-caste”; “other”; ‘the dark one’

Autobiography and positionality

- ...and humble beginnings
 - 2nd child (eldest daughter) of Graeme & Carol
 - Graeme – no formal qualifications: farm labourer, truck driver, factory worker (fitter/welder)
 - Carol – no formal qualifications: housewife, mother, factory worker, carer
- Despite being raised Pākehā, I do not consider myself white; arguably I am neither Pākehā nor am I Maori but rather, some kind of hybrid

Autobiography and positionality

- Moeke-Maxwell (2005) conceptualises a Māori women's hybridity rather than an essentialist reading of identity
 - “Maori Pakeha/Other hybrids live with the daily contradiction of being positioned as indigenous as well as a variant of the Pakeha/Other... The hybrid woman acknowledges her dual/multiple narratives and family values and practices. She is a containment of both cultures” (Moeke-Maxwell 2005: 503).

Autobiography and positionality

- My identity and position within NZ:
 - embodiment of two different and opposing cultures: “native/colonial, colonized/colonizer, Maori/Pakeha/Other” (Moeke-Maxwell 2005: 503)
 - ‘witness’ to colonial subjectification (negative), racism, assumptions, speculation ...
 - Resistance to interpellation and essentialising discourses in attempting to negotiate my bi/multiracial identity

Autobiography and positionality

- “Race”/ethnicity, gender, age, and status as a student were each significant to how I positioned myself and was positioned by others
- In the Philippines:
 - Essentialised as (a different) “Other”
 - Homogenised and compressed view of white-as-western, white-as-American
 - A consequence of colonialism?

Autobiography and positionality

- Effects of being “Othered”
 - Discomfit due to link to colonial ‘master’
 - Desire to explain not-as-white-as-all-the-others- whiteness and to assert my NZ identity and Maori descent
 - Broke down barriers? Created new barriers?
 - Provoked interest and curiosity?
 - Sharing of knowledge (not specifically related to the research topic)

Autobiography and positionality

- Effects of being “Othered”
 - ‘Trying on’ different identities/subjectivities: mestiza, foreigner, New Zealander (Australian), indigenous/Māori; student; female (single, married)
 - 1997: use of term mestiza as well as identifying as being of Māori (‘native’, ‘indigenous’) descent, where possible
 - 2003 and 2004: less comfortable with the term ‘mestiza’ and self-identification as NZer (Māori, native, indigenous), (Australian), foreigner

Implications

- Who we are affects what we do, how we know, what we can know, how we are treated, what we count as knowledge ...
- Material effects as a consequence of being made aware of identity and positionality w.r.t how research is conducted
- An active role in re-creating identity
- Destabilising (challenging) monoliths and essentialist discourses



Implications

- Destabilisation of assumptions of Western homogeneity
- An account of the diversity of researchers from 'the West' engaging in qualitative research
 - e.g. a non-white, postcolonial 'native' living in a Western country doing research in a different non-Western country

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