Reflections on Ethical Issues: A Study of How Urban Women Dealt with Impoverishment
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ABSTRACT

This paper argues for the pursuit of social science research as a moral enterprise. The paper builds on the experience gained by the author during a 14-months post-graduate fieldwork project in a provincial town of Masvingo in southern Zimbabwe. Central to the research process is the need for participation, integrity and responsibility on the part of researchers. In deciding what is appropriate behaviour by the researcher there is need to take into account both local and global expectations and demands. Good and effective researchers should possess what Adjibolosoo terms positive human factor attributes such as integrity, loyalty, accountability, responsibility, motivation, honesty, wisdom, vision, dedication, commitment, creativity, skills, knowledge, understanding and trustworthiness. Ethically driven research entails establishing caring relationships and a concern for the well being of respondents. The paper also raises issues pertaining to the problematic of a man studying women, the politics of fieldwork and research as a political process, how a researcher positions himself/herself in order to engage policy makers and the powerful. Research it is argued should be founded on the basis of mutual respect. This means the avoidance of deception, dishonesty and pretence in fieldwork settings. A researcher without a caring ethic will find it hard to understand fieldwork challenges and observations. Ethical caring is the foundation on which trust between researcher and respondents is built in the course of research.

INTRODUCTION

Critiques of anthropological research are generally silent on ethical issues. Kipnis (1987: 30) observes, "Ethics is best thought of as a collective undertaking by which wisdom is developed. It is a shared critical reflection upon common obligations as professionals". Ethics raises issues that have both a moral and practical dimension. Anthropological research very much depends on establishing rapport between the researcher and population of study. The way researchers conduct themselves during and after fieldwork, what researchers ask and how far they can go in their search for information, the writing up of ethnographic materials an important aspect of representation of the research communities are issues that have ethical implications for those involved in anthropological research. This paper draws on experiences gained from a fourteen-month fieldwork research project conducted in Masvingo Zimbabwe in 1994/95. The paper discusses a number of ethical issues emanating from this fieldwork research experience. While the study belonged to the much familiar category of 'doing anthropology at home', a number of issues that have a bearing on research ethics can be derived from the study. The discussions are in

line with Crick's (1989) exhortation on the need to share fieldwork experiences this should be particularly so where ethics are concerned.

Any study that involves humans raises ethical concerns. While it is not always possible to make a distinction between what is ethically right and wrong in the course of research, every researcher should be guided by some principles in terms of dos and don'ts in research. While acknowledging that every research situation poses ethical dilemmas for researchers, the problems confronting those studying their own societies are many and multiple. Some of the problems that have a bearing on ethical issues emanate from the fact that the researcher is expected to know what behavioural stances are proper and expected. In a study such as the one conducted amongst female heads of households in Masvingo I was confronted by many problems that had an ethical dimension. The sections that follow begin by contextualising the study and goes on to examine specific ethical issues.

1. THE ORGANISATION AND CONDUCT OF FIELDWORK

The study on which the discussions of this chapter are based was carried out in Masvingo, a provincial town of 52, 000 people in southern Zimbabwe (CSO, 1993). The fourteen months of extended study from the last quarter of 1994 to the end of the end of 1995 produced mainly qualitative data though quantitative data was also collected. Multiple research techniques were used in order to gain greater insights into the various urban coping and survival strategies used by women heads of households. In addition to informal interviews and observations in the community, 58 female heads of households were selected for in-depth and intensive interviews. The female heads that participated in the in-depth interviews from January to May 1995 were found using snowball sampling. I was also involved in some activities as a semi-participant.

During my fieldwork my family was a split and decentred one. My wife, Irene was completing a three-year diploma in education at Seke Teacher's College in Harare some 290 kilometres from Masvingo. She only joined us during some weekends and school holidays. Our two elder daughters were at a boarding school in Masvingo. I stayed with my fraternal twins still at pre-school then, a maternal cousin and a domestic worker. This turned out to be of great help and an aid to my understanding of the lives of female heads of households in Masvingo. The Masvingo study focused mainly on how urban female heads of households dealt with impoverishment. In the sections that follow I examine a number of ethical issues that had a bearing on this study with a view to raising these issues as a problematic anyone conducting fieldwork must know.

2. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

The Masvingo study took into account the need to fulfil the ethical requirements for postgraduate human science research of the University of Waikato in New Zealand. While the code of conduct that governed the conduct of research for Waikato University was oriented to the New Zealand situation, issues relating to honesty and participation, pretence during fieldwork settings, the problematic of a man researching women, and the politics and political context of the research process have a cross cultural significance. By and large I had to contextualize the research within the Zimbabwean situation and experiences.

Locating respondents was easy. There were no refusals. Some kind of self-selection must have taken place behind the stage, and only those respondents willing to be involved in the research were actually introduced to me. Research participants were briefed on the purpose and objectives of the study, before being asked whether they still wanted to participate or not in the study. I also made it clear that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the research process. In the end none withdrew. Respondents were told that no material or monetary benefits would accrue to them personally as a result of participating in the study. The promise for confidentiality was made. There were no names or addresses written on the interview schedules. The interview schedules were coded using number sets. The codes key was kept separately from the schedules in a notebook. No other person other than myself had access to the research information. Respondents were assured that only their children's names would be used during write-ups in order to maintain anonymity. The use of children's names was later on dropped to ensure the complete anonymity of respondents. No names were used in the thesis and only pseudonyms have been used in other publications arising from the study. For the thesis and most other write-ups different letters from the alphabet have been selected to represent respondents. Respondents are referred to only by single or two alphabets, complete anonymity has thus been guaranteed. The above procedures followed the Waikato guidelines where complete anonymity is demanded.

The demands of the Waikato University Human Research Ethics Committee were adapted to the Zimbabwean research setting. For example, literacy levels are not very high in Zimbabwe. Waikato research guidelines demand the signing of consent forms by respondents. It was realised that even if consent forms had been translated into Shona (the most widely spoken language in Masvingo), the people would not have understood the legal and academic technicalities involved in such an exercise. Masvingo respondents were not used to bureaucratic procedures like form filling, and possessed a deadly negative view of such processes; such attitudes date back to the advent of colonialism.

Form filling was thus likely to prejudice research participants' attitudes toward the study. Even the use of seemingly value-neutral words like 'informant' could easily create uneasy feelings among many people in

Zimbabwe. During the war of liberation, 'informants' were regarded as traitors who collaborated with the colonial enemy. Words like informant used on the Waikato consent forms, were thus loaded terms in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe the problems arising from form filling are usually avoided by local researchers by obtaining research clearance from local collective bodies that act as gate-keepers. In the case of the Masvingo study such authorisation was obtained from the Municipality in June 1994, but during fieldwork individual verbal consent was solicited. By and large however, the Masvingo study was guided by both the New Zealand and the Commonwealth Association of Social Anthropologists codes of ethics.

Throughout fieldwork to the research participants I was first and foremost a lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe. This was despite the fact that participants had been told that the data were being gathered for a doctorate project with the University of Waikato in New Zealand. Possible uses of the data were discussed with participants. It was made clear that some articles, and hopefully also a book on the Masvingo project will be published, but that information will be presented in such a way that individuals cannot be identified. Part of the research findings will also be used in the development of teaching materials for the University of Zimbabwe's urban anthropology and social policy courses. It was also hinted to the participants that the study might possibly help in generating policy-oriented programs aimed at alleviating the plight of poor urban women, among them female heads of households. The respondents were quite enthusiastic about the last two proposals. They gave their consent unreservedly.

Ideally anthropological research should have mutual benefits to both the researcher and research participants. An important ethical consideration therefore is the need to develop possibly a lifetime debt to research participants by the researcher. This concern leads to the conclusion that good anthropology is moral and applied in its orientation. This view recognises the missionary role of anthropologists. I am in agreement with Bourdillon's (1997: 156) comment that "the tradition of careful observation and critical analysis is valued by the societies that support the discipline, and anthropologists have an obligation to acquire and to disseminate knowledge obtained by such means." This demands a high degree of commitment by anthropologists to improving the welfare of research participants. Quite often like in the Masvingo case research participants are disadvantaged members of society, hence the need for the anthropologist to act as an advocate in the interests of the research population. Uppermost in the mind of the anthropologist should be a consideration of the potential repercussions of publications on the study population. In many ways a researcher carries with him/her heavy responsibilities that last years after completion of the research project. At every stage even long after completion of fieldwork there is a permanent need to minimise and avoid actions even through publications that might harm respondents. This is what the Waikato guidelines demanded.

3. HONESTY AND PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

The issue of honesty and participation is important for anthropologists doing fieldwork 'at home'. I fully agree with Bourdillon's (1997) observation that while full participation might be impossible to achieve or even undesirable in certain fieldwork contexts, it is nevertheless necessary albeit in a limited manner in order to gain a fuller understanding of social processes. As a citizen anthropologist, I realised that I could not completely avoid commenting on issues that affected my respondents. There was also an inherent commitment to engage in research that might contribute towards an improvement of the respondents' situation. Applied anthropology and research can influence possible behavioural outcomes. For me the realisation that the conclusions that I reach as a result of my involvement might be flawed, even wrong, or less plausible than competing explanations or alternatives, has generated caution on my part.

Contrary to Schrijvers' (1991: 178) assertion that "we are not required to love those we study, or even give them our unqualified approval", for me as a citizen anthropologist my participation in the research project had to be premised on being honest and that meant unqualified 'love' and empathy for the respondents. And I feel strongly that it should be part of the ethical requirements of any social scientist engaged in research at home or anywhere else. I exhort my western counterparts to use the same standards when studying either their own people or indigenous peoples. True research ethics should rest on the principle that one should behave as if one were to remain in the community for a long-term period as its full-time member.

Being honest in one's actions affects how one builds relationships with research participants. Doing anthropology at home made me realise the merits of Mayer's comment that fieldwork entails "the balanced reciprocity of relationships and information" sharing (quoted by Mascarenhas-Keys 1987, p. 186). There were times when I felt obliged to give gifts in kind to some participants, especially those who became part of the extended observational study. I interacted with them as a friend and a classificatory relative. This made me realise that a researcher should have resources at his/her disposal so as to participate in gift exchange transactions. At times a meal was offered, but as a general principle such offers were politely turned down. Generally I asked for a glass of water, to quench my thirst but more to create feelings of mutual acceptance without cost to my respondents. I considered my intrusion in the women's lives enough of a cost.

Anthropological fieldwork is usually a full-time job. When research is done away from 'home' by non-citizen anthropologists it might resemble a part-time activity, there may be a lack of commitment and a readiness to withdraw from the field anytime the researcher feels homesick. Such is the attitude of anthropologists like Rabinow, whose comment regarding his research in

Morocco was "I had a strong sense of being American. I knew it was time to leave" (quoted by Beal 1995, p. 296). Not only does this display an arrogance and lack of empathy not uncharacteristic of non-citizen anthropologists; this could be regarded as a kind of deceitful behaviour. Such an attitude shows that to a great extent non-citizen anthropologists rarely fully assimilate into the communities they study. Yet in my case I found it impossible to completely distance myself from the research project. I became part of the situation that I was studying. However, I should hasten to say that being a citizen anthropologist as such does not in itself guarantee that one would assimilate with ease. Commitment to the well being of the respondents is likely to be higher when the researcher is a citizen or a permanent member of the community he/she is studying.

3.1 INTEGRITY IN RESEARCH

Research should in many ways be regarded as a moral endeavour. Central to the research process is the need for integrity and responsibility for one's actions with regard to other fellow human beings. It is useful that researchers can learn from Fenstermacher's (1990: 133) exhortation that "the teacher's conduct at all times and in all ways, is a moral matter". Bourdillon (1997) stressed this point in his discussion of the problematic of studying a local parish where he was ordinarily a member. For him research requires some degree of integrity. Bourdillon (1997: 157) observed "in deciding what is appropriate research behaviour, we need to consider … what is required of us by the societies that support us". Researchers need to be imbibed by what Adjibolosoo (1995) refers to as positive human factor (HF). According to Adjibolosoo (2000: 3) good citizens and in the same vein good researchers need HF characteristics such as "integrity, loyalty, accountability, responsibility, motivation, honesty, wisdom, vision, dedication, commitment, creativity, skills, knowledge, understanding, and trustworthiness …" Research if it is to be effective in transforming society needs to be carried out by those with integrity and possessing positive HF qualities.

3.2 COMMITMENT TO LOCAL COMMUNITY INTERESTS

Closely related to the need for integrity in research is an unqualified commitment to the advancement of local community interests. Boonzaier (1998: 173) noted that as citizen anthropologists "we cannot escape the consequences of our presence by moving to other research fields, and by pretending to ignore the long-term fallout from our activities". Researchers' primary task is to create a space for a multiplicity of voices in a given population to be heard. Working for local empowerment and advancing of community interests need not blind

researchers to the limitations of action research. There is a need to guide against political correctness when it comes to understanding development issues. Ethically driven research should be a critic and voice of conscience. This approach guided the Masvingo study. A desire to see a qualitative improvement in women heads of households' lives did not result in a total condemnation of officials, yet at the same time the study sought to influence policy by making those in charge aware of some of the short comings of their actions. However, a researcher's responsibility lies ultimately with the population of study. Unless one has a strong desire to see positive improvements in the lives of those one studies there is no justification for extended fieldwork. Commitment to a community should be total and unconditional.

3.3 THE UPHOLDING OF BASIC FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN VALUES

While it is sometimes hard to establish what the real fundamental values are as researchers we need to look at a society's values as our guide in our research endeavours. In most instances we are clear about what is right and wrong. For instance ethical research entails establishing caring relationships and concern with the welfare of respondents. As McLaughlin (1990: 194) noted in relation to teacher-pupil classroom settings, but equally applicable to different field research settings "ethical caring requires boundaries on being oneself, on the intensity of interpersonal relationships . . . on dialogue with students. Ethical care demands self control". A researcher without a caring ethic will find it hard to understand fieldwork challenges and observations. Ethical caring is the foundation on which trust between researcher and respondents is built in the course of research. Besides caring there are fundamental human values that contribute to good rapport between researcher and research participants. Positive HF characteristics noted above constitute a key set of values that are useful to the conduct of successful research. From the Masvingo experience ethically driven research is the foundation of positive HF values. Doing what is right and useful to the community is in itself and in many ways ethical.

4. PROBLEMATIC OF A MAN STUDYING WOMEN

I observed cross-cultural differences in terms of how people reacted to my study of how female heads of household dealt with impoverishment. In Zimbabwe I met with encouragement, whereas in New Zealand comments of surprise were quite common. Maybe the different reactions are premised on differences in perceptions on the issue of male-female researcher-participant relationships. Gregory (1984) observed that the traditionally accepted view regarding the inaccessibility of the women's world to male ethnographers is largely a rationalisation, which justifies not collecting information about women; glosses

over the fact that such information is can be readily attainable; makes enormous assumptions that the information so obtained would be so distorted as to be useless; and lastly asserts that there are no comparable problems for females working with men or researching other women. My experiences force me to hint that there is need to see Gregory's observations as situation specific, the views seem not to have a universal application.

Thomas (1989) pointed out that ethnographic engagement entailed trust and taking people seriously when in the field. For me, as a man studying women, I took women research participants seriously. Taking people seriously is a prerequisite to success whether one is a man or woman. My respondents engaged me in talk about life problems and personal lifestyles. I think they were able to take me seriously and to confide in me possibly not because of my gender, but because I empathised with and understood their concerns and lived experiences.

Pool's (1991: 73) comment that fieldwork accounts should not be 'souvenirs' but must reflect a synthesis of the researcher and participants' inputs, have implications for studies such as the one on which this paper is based. In what I saw, heard, and in my analysis and interpretations, I have been especially conscious of gender and the role of patriarchy in shaping women's lives. I feel that I personally gained from my study in terms of improved inter-personal relationships and developing a gender conscious worldview. Gender sensitivity is something anthropologists as a rule must strive to attain in order to come up with holistic analyses of their research settings. Empathy, sensitivity and concern for research participants are key ethical issues in the research process.

The demands of fieldwork can be so high that they result in what Crick (1982) referred to as 'participant fatigue'. In my case, however, due to the enriching relationships that I established with my respondents, the one year of fieldwork appeared to be quite short for me, and despite my lack of time, I did not experience such 'fatigue'.

Another aspect that any man studying women need to be aware of is what Devault (1990: 107) refers to as 'conversation and discourse analysis', which provides clues to emotions and meanings in interactions with respondents. Sometimes as I sat listening to participants' conversations, I saw and heard more than I had tried to elicit. Some of these conversations have stuck vividly in my memory. I often use them as *aids memoirs* to understand and better analyse my data.

5. POLITICS AND THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

It is important to take into account the political context of fieldwork at every stage of the research process. The Masvingo women strove to feed, clothe,

educate, and sometimes to invest part of their surplus income for their own futures and those of their children. I sometimes faced tensions between the need to intervene by publicising police harassment of women vendors and the need to maintain a distanced position enabling one to complete the study. I reasoned that any such active interventions needed to be on a sustained basis and since I was going to withdraw for sometime after my fieldwork, my activism would not work in the best long-term interests of the participants. Due to practical considerations, communication could not be maintained with the participants during the write-up phase; hence the production of the thesis was solely my responsibility. However, because I regarded my absence from the field as merely temporary, given my status as a citizen anthropologist, it forced me always to take into account the possible implications of written accounts.

As Fabian (1991: 182) noted "dilemmas appear when we consider the consequences of our work before and after" fieldwork. According to Fabian (1991: 182) it is impossible to forestall all possible problems because "there is no way of knowing in advance what kind of consequences our projects will bring about". For citizen anthropologists Fabian (1991) drew attention to the potential unintended consequence research findings may have on those we study. "Are we not blocking with our ethnographies.... what may have been routes of escape from oppression in situations where resistance is not (yet) possible?" (Fabian 1991: 189) asked rhetorically.

Given the nature of Zimbabwean micro-level politics today and the state's extended reach into people's lives, what appear to be politically safe acts today may not be safe in a few years to come, or even tomorrow. There is therefore a need to be cautious and to protect the identity of participants, just in case of a different tomorrow, which may produce tensions within oneself in terms of what one knows from the fieldwork and what one reports in terms of ethical guidelines.

5.1 'SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER'

There is always the possibility that research findings do not find their way to policy makers. In terms of what might be considered as the 'politics of truth', it is imperative that researchers ensure that the results of their studies reach those in decision-making positions. During the Masvingo study I talked to officials in Council and government as well as members of non-governmental bodies with a view to ensuring that one got their attention to the plight of poor people especially women. With hindsight it appears essential that a researcher must organise dissemination workshops for decision-makers at various levels. This I did not do. Quite often policy makers have no time to read published materials whether its in the form of theses/dissertations, articles in journals, chapters in books, monographs and books. This material is dutifully acknowledged and then simply filed away.

Given the changing political and socio-economic scene in Zimbabwe as elsewhere it becomes imperative that as researchers we move beyond the realm of critique to a situation where we try to ensure that our research outputs feed into policy. Our intervention as researchers could be in support or in opposition to actions being pursued by different actors for as long as researchers perceive such interventions to be contributing or not to the general welfare of the target populations. In order to take on this critical role of informing policy makers Spiegel, Watson and Wilkinson's (1997: 16) observes "it is essential to maintain enough critical distance from the decision to enter onto the terrain of policy discourse to grasp the otherwise unanticipated difficulties and consequences that that decision may entail". In other words in the course of interacting with decision making bodies researchers need to set themselves standards and guidelines that regulate such interactions.

6. THE PROBLEMATIC OF DOING ANTHROPOLOGY AT HOME

6.1 MULTIPLE ROLES

Narayan (1993) examined an issue relevant to the Masvingo study, namely the possible illusions of one's role as a 'native anthropologist'. Narayan acknowledged that she learnt a great deal about her own Indian society by studying it. As Srinivas, cited by Narayan (1993: 679), pointed out, "one knows about a society from particular locations within it". She argued that the intense and sustained engagements of fieldwork affect the nature of fieldwork roles and relationships. For Narayan (1993: 682), knowledge is "but situated, negotiated, and part of an on-going process. This process spans personal, professional, and cultural domains." In other words, an indigenous or citizen researcher is at once an outsider, who must, as I did, try hard not to take anything for granted. At the same time he/she is an insider hedged with all the disadvantages and advantages that comes with familiarity. This requires adoption of a principled stance.

6.2 BECOMING A 'MULTIPLE NATIVE'

Mascarenhas-Keys (1987) noted that doing anthropology at home meant becoming a 'multiple native'[1] in order to handle the cultural complexities of field situations. I adopted the 'multiple native' strategy in the Masvingo study. I was socially and psychologically mobile. The car enabled me to visit poor men's pubs and 'posh' hotels, sometimes in the course of one evening. A Goffman-style of impression management was maintained, leading to some kind of a

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[1] multiple native refers to a person's ability to operate at more than one level and acquisition of multiple identities.

'dramaturgical research enterprise'. However, this adoption of an appropriate mask, depending on situational context, is not necessarily deceitful. Most of us dress for a wedding, funeral, church or party celebrations. Appropriateness in these instances does not involve social deceit, although there exists a thin line between the two, which every researcher must always strive not to cross in the direction of deceitfulness.

I also observed that acquiring fictive kin relationships legitimates one's presence in the field. By the end of the first three months of my fieldwork, most of the women had themselves worked out a place for me in their kinship terminology. In fact, some of the women, as I discovered later, actually were distant relatives. It was the women who took the initiative to inscribe me within a particular kinship category. Communication appeared more open and fruitful when conducted in the idiom of kinship. It was as if, through fieldwork, I had come home to renew dormant kin networks.

6.3 COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Cheater (1987) examined the problematic of doing anthropology at home. For Cheater (1987) citizen anthropologists find themselves confronted by the problem of how to communicate effectively with fellow professionals outside their society as well as how to communicate with fellow citizens. Fellow citizens include students, local professionals and bureaucrats, as well as the research participants. Cheater (1987: 168) notes that "policy, reflected in legislation, always intrudes into research, especially in one's own society, and while the evaluation of policy can be objective in its orientation, in the context of local research, the goals of such policy evaluation form part of the situational contingency by which being-in-situation is constructed. In such contexts, being-for-itself is more often constructed within the encompassing frame of citizenship rather than the more limited context of profession".

Unacceptable constructions of reality in the eyes of state bureaucrats may result in the withdrawal of offending academics' citizenship rights. Fortunately this ever-lurking threat in any fieldwork situation did not materialise in my case. Cheater (1987) also argued the need by the researcher to clarify the subjective construction of both observation and analysis. Such constructions need to be informed by ethical guidelines.

7. PRETENCE AND ETHICAL JUDGEMENTS IN FIELDWORK

Genuine research is founded on mutual respect and trust between researcher and research participants. Bourdillon (1997) observed that the manipulative use of fieldwork relations constitute deception and dishonesty practices. This is to be avoided by ethically informed researchers. There is a need for a researcher in

accordance with one's principles to avoid pretence. A discord between one's inner feelings and outward expressions as the Malinowski diaries showed constitutes pretence and deceitful behaviour. Yet as Bourdillon (1997: 154) poses "is such discord not a natural part of fieldwork – indeed of social life?" Fieldwork is not simply play-acting; it requires a genuine interest and mutual respect of respondents. My advice is that a person need to be oneself even during fieldwork settings, this minimises pretence. As a researcher one should never lie, but this does not mean telling the whole truth in all settings. It sounds like a basic truism about social life.

Sometimes participation in societal and a community's activities confers some responsibilities and expectations on the researcher. I attended church, visited pubs and hotels, visited people's homes and being close to my home area also took part in family get together occasions such as weddings and funerals. Fieldwork demands had the potential to create conflict in terms of what form of participation and the type of activities I should engage in. However, in a fieldwork situation lasting slightly more than a year the type of dissonance arising due to conflicts from pressures from different groups was very minimal. In the case of fieldwork in a community where one would be a permanent member the type of research I engaged was likely to have given rise to role conflict. The basic guiding principle in fieldwork research should be a search for an understanding about what people do and the value of people's actions to their well being. We need to unpack assumptions behind people's actions and in the process arrive at informed judgements regarding human behaviour. We need to be ourselves during fieldwork. One learns by taking part without imposing our values and beliefs on other people.

One's behaviour during fieldwork is a statement in itself regarding who we are and what we stand for. It is very often impossible to maintain the observer-insider/outsider distinction. At times it is not even desirable to do so. The fact that everybody knew I was a temporary member of Masvingo community made a difference in what my respondents expected from me and also in my investments in the social networks of which I was a part. Yet I still feel that I interacted with Masvingo respondents in mutually beneficial ways without deceit. I still feel that mutual respect and friendship guided my interactions.

There are instances when pretence might not be bad after all. For instance when I accompanied one of the respondents during her cross-border trip to South Africa I indicated on my application for a visa that I was going on holiday. This I did not consider a lie. I felt that for as long as the Masvingo women in my ample knew the purpose of my study I was not duty bound to announce to everybody what my business was. The question is was I being deceitful? Do we need to tell everybody everything regarding our lives and is it desirable to do so? I consider my research to have been driven by ethical principles in every respect.

8. FRIENDSHIP, VULNERABILITY AND POWER

Friendship creates obligations and expectations. Yet it is inevitable that a researcher engaged in fieldwork with time come to be regarded as a friend and in turn develops friendship networks with respondents. However, one needs to always balance the research interests, personal interests and commitments to friendship networks. As it turned out doing a study on how female heads of households dealt with urban poverty, proved easy though demanding both emotionally and materially. A study which I carried out on women urban tenants in a secondary town in Lesotho, with most of the respondents being married, showed me that there are potential difficulties or rather certain considerations one must take into account as a man carrying out research amongst a predominantly female research population.

In Masvingo as already mentioned interviews were done in most cases in the multi-purpose one room. Sometimes during the extended fieldwork period from May 1995 to December 1995, I visited respondents in the evening. My respondents were accessible at all times and were quite happy to sit and talk about life with me. I feel that when dealing with married women such an approach would not be possible without raising an eyebrow. It is therefore imperative on the part of a researcher to take cognisance of cultural expectations as a guide on one's individual conduct. It would be naïve on my part to suggest that relations with respondents were based on true equality, considering the amount of resources at my disposal and my job as a university lecturer. Yet in many ways that status differential did not go in the way of research as an interactive process. Ethical conduct in research settings requires that a researcher is fully aware at every stage of the potential distortions in terms of research outcomes due to unequal power balances.

Researcher vulnerability is a factor rarely discussed in research manuals. This is something real. Friendship can create a state of vulnerability for both researcher and respondents. During fieldwork a number of respondents began to confide in me regarding their personal lives as well as family life. These intricate and delicate issues regarding people's life weigh heavily on the researcher, who must act at times as a counsellor and confidant. Increasingly during fieldwork I came to play this role often despite my limited training in interpersonal relations and conflict reduction and coping strategies. Sometimes I felt inadequately prepared to handle respondents' problems. I gave my respondents an ear. I suggest that a researcher should avoid appearing to be in a hurry, as this is demeaning to respondents.

I will cite two areas where I found myself reflecting on what I was doing and feeling a bit uneasy. I was introduced to a prostitute who in turn introduced me to her network. I did the in-depth interview in her one-roomed unit. I kept on asking myself what is going on in the mind of her neighbours, the community, and possibly amongst those who knew me seeing park at a prostitute's place and taking time inside her room. Masvingo is a small town; fortunately I did not

come across negative gossip with regard to my character. I had to visit the pubs and hotels in order to understand prostitution as a survival strategy. I learnt a lot as a researcher from this experience. My advice is that when one does a study such as the Masvingo one, there is need for one to be morally upright and principled, as faltering in this regard might ruin the whole research process. At the same time it is through fieldwork that we learn to appreciate the humanity and problems of those ordinarily regarded as deviant in our societies.

The second example I will refer to is the decision for me to accompany one of my respondents on a weeklong trip to Pretoria, South Africa. I had no difficult getting the consent of one of my respondents to agree as this was toward the end of my fieldwork and by then everybody knew for certain that I was just a researcher. Yet since she was going to stay with a brother based in Pretoria she on her initiative told me that she had informed them that I was an uncle to her late husband. While I did not ask her why she did that she must have felt it odd and that her brother would not understand why a male stranger would accompany her during her cross-border trading operations. My researcher status was not revealed. I felt comfortable regarding the chosen identity for me. Yet this behaviour raises issues that show that even the most unproblematic research might still reveal areas that require attention from an ethical point of view. The best guide in terms of research ethics is the Christian maxim *do unto others what you would want then do unto you.*

9. DISENGAGEMENT FROM THE FIELDWORK RESEARCH SETTING

Smith (1990) discussed the problem of disengaging oneself from the field situation. I had planned to leave a lasting positive impression among my research participants, and had set aside three to four days in the first week of January 1996 to say individual goodbyes. Unfortunately the death of my mother on 31 December 1995 and subsequently her funeral arrangements, as well as my departure for New Zealand on 9 January 1996, prevented these goodbye plans from materialising. However, I managed to say goodbye to most of the participants involved in the extended fieldwork, but not to most of the women vendors and those involved with intensive interviews at the beginning of my study. I was disappointed about this inability to withdraw from the field according to plan. After creating intentional or unintentional research participants' expectations it is rather unethical to simply abandon them. Care must be taken at the exit stage the end of data gathering phase. Irene, sensing my disappointment, commented "I think you like Masvingo so much that you no longer intend to leave the place."

I think that disengagement can be harmful to participants in ways unknown to the researcher. I had intended to renew contact on my return to Zimbabwe, upon my completion of the PhD in 1997. This would have enabled me to gauge

the mood and emotions during my absence of some of the participants in my one year of fieldwork in Masvingo. Unfortunately I only had a brief stay in Zimbabwe on completion of my studies, thereby making it difficult to initiate meaningful contact with my research participants, though I have maintained contact with a few. I have now deferred initiating contact with my respondents to beginning of 2002. At the time of writing this chapter I was on leave of absence from the University of Zimbabwe till the end of 2001 and worked as Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the National University of Lesotho. My inability to interact with respondents after my PhD makes me feel guilt that I have not done a payback response to my respondents. I have gained professionally and written so much from this study, it is my remaining hope that in the not too distant future I should be in a position to initiate contacts with the female heads of households in my Masvingo sample. I am committed to contribute more meaningful to an improvement of women's lives.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion has pointed to a number of considerations that need to be taken into account when conducting social science research. Care must be taken to ensure that research participants' interests are taken into account and no harm befalls them, at every stage of the research process from gaining entry, establishing rapport with research participants working through the maze and final exit phase. A set of guidelines in terms of how a researcher should conduct himself/herself in the field is a pre-requisite to good research. While an ethically conscious researcher stand to benefit from organisational codes of behaviour, the Masvingo study showed that ultimately a researcher should be accountable not only to the community but to oneself. One must work toward doing research and establishing research based on mutual respect, care and trust. Researchers should consider themselves as long-term members in a community and should adopt the good neighbour principle. When applying ethical guidelines there is always the need to balance these with personal experiences and to orient oneself towards others in ways that focus on respect and social justice and empowering the research community. To some extent research is a political process, characterised by power differentials in the conduct of research. It is highly desirable that a researcher should minimise status differentials and strive to do research that is beneficial to the study population.

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