

Of Photographs and Papaya

Researching Wellbeing and Motifs of Gift Exchange

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Research in a social setting



- Community- their place, their lives...
- Research- entering their lives...
 - Conscious of context, language, traditions



- Takes place within relationships
 - Through local organisations, colleagues and team members
 - Opening up space to talk, listening



Professional relationships



- Relationships with team
 - Training and leading fieldwork
 - But also social aspects including asking them about 'this place'
- Relationship with people
 - Premised on my professional training
 - Co-researchers in social relationships with people whom I interview- relatives, friends, same community
 - Team's strong connections help to talk with people and include me in social aspect
 - Most important- opening up space to talk to people

Relationships: power

- My position (privilege)
 - No expectations
 - Seeking their permission, giving them control
 - Listening to their views
- Do people I interview have power?
 - People refusing to speak with me?
 - By speaking to me making their voice heard?
- But
 - “Who am I to tell you anything? You are the educated person!”
 - Seeking help from me, expectations from the conversation
- Responses
 - ‘Obvious’ questions- I lack knowledge; not assuming I know
 - Asking repeatedly for their view, I cannot answer in their stead

In the social

- Constantly aware of the social- maintaining distinction between social and professional
- Keeping ‘myself’ outside the interview setting
- For them no distinction
 - Relationships running seamlessly into one another... all social
 - I am an intruder, asking too many questions
 - Sometimes a ‘friend’ listening to them

Gifts

- Photographs to thank them
 - Social events, posing, people lining up at makeshift studio
 - Waiting for... families to collect, people to wear their good clothes
 - Assuring them no charge
- But!
 - Gifts in exchange for having taken photographs- waited patiently, brought prints
 - Whatever they have- fruits, vegetables, sometimes freshly brewed alcohol!



Gifts

- My dilemma
 - Refusal?
 - They are badly off
 - I did not expect anything, in fact stressing that this was something to compensate them for their time
- Reciprocating for what they see as something inherently social; photographs and the events around them... inherently social



Gift



- Gift in the relationship itself
 - My being a 'friend'
 - Ask questions about my life
 - Ask for things- advice, lifts, my sandals!
 - Place for speaking
 - Making them reflect on their lives- a fresh way of looking at things
 - Asking about me- challenging my boundary
 - Do I reveal?
 - What do I reveal? How much?
 - Especially towards end when leaving... their last (and only) chance to ask me the questions that I have asked them over and over

Reflections



- Refusal
 - Emphasising my not being from there?
 - Reinforcing the power dynamic in the face of their attempts to reduce it by socialising what I view as a professional relationship?
 - Accepting some gifts may have reduced that... especially when already formed relationships with people