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'What's in it for me?': Negotiations of asymmetries, concerns and interests between the researcher and research subjects

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Abstract
Pre-interview interactions between qualitative researchers and research subjects are characterized by two-way sense-making processes, through which research subjects attempt to make sense of researchers' intentions, and what they themselves stand to gain or lose from participating in a given research. Based on a reflexive account of my ethnographic fieldwork experiences in Kenya's South Coast region, among men known as 'beach boys' and as participants of 'female sex tourism', I illustrate how the concerns and interests of my target interviewees were generated and negotiated during the pre-interview phase. I do so by analysing our pre-interview interactions, drawing links between my assigned identities, asymmetries between us and the concerns and interests that were generated, as the men considered their participation or non-participation in the research.

Keywords
fieldwork identities, researcher–researched relationships, male beach workers, beach boys, beach tourism, Kenya

> Workshop instructor: What will your interviewees get out of participating in your interviews and your research in general?
>
> Silence . . .
>
> Doctoral participant 1: The women in my study are an 'invisible' group. My research would give them some visibility, an opportunity to be heard.

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Workshop instructor: Yes . . . Would anyone else like to share their thoughts?

Silence . . .

Workshop instructor: As an example, do you think you'll need to give them some form of compensation?

Doctoral participant 2: I will be interviewing exploited employees, who normally have no one to listen to them. For once they will have someone listening to them narrating experiences that they would probably never have shared with anyone. The interviews will have a therapeutic effect for them and for these reasons, I don't think compensating them would be OK.

Doctoral participant 3: Although our respective interviews might have therapeutic effects for the interviewees, I think we shouldn't forget that we are social scientists and not therapists. Therapeutic or not, some of us will be interviewing socially disadvantaged persons. For me it would make sense to compensate them for their participation.

Workshop instructor: That's something each of you will need to think about . . .

Junior researchers around the world generally attend numerous workshops and training sessions. Among those I attended, the most memorable were strangely those in which awkward silence often followed the instructor's questions, as in the pre-fieldwork training session in the extract above. In this particular workshop, most of the participants were enrolled in a range of social science PhD programs and were preparing for their first field trips. As budding researchers based in Western countries, most participants were preparing to conduct research among marginalized groups of men and women, from, or in, developing countries. My own was going to focus on understanding the lives of Kenyan men working on the beaches of Kenya's South Coast, who are popularly known as 'beach boys', and in academic literature as participants in 'female sex tourism', their counterparts being certain Western white women. In this workshop, we were being stimulated to think about the benefits we expected our interviewees to derive from participating in our respective interviews and research in general.

Retrospectively, the closest some doctoral participants had come to think in terms of what their research projects would represent for their future interviewees were the opportunities they would be creating for the research subjects to 'voice their experiences'. A rather generalized and perhaps naïve assumption was that the interviewees' interests would be fully served, through the opportunities to 'raise their voices' that the research projects would create for them. Furthermore, while most participants had undoubtedly thought about the personal and theoretical value of their research, few it seemed, had considered the potential asymmetries between them and their future interviewees, and the possibility that the target

participants would go into deliberations on what they stood to gain or lose from participating in the respective research projects.

Here, I reflect on my pre-interview fieldwork experiences on Kenya's South Coast, among male beach workers who pursue a range of tourism-related livelihoods. I show how the concerns and interests of my potential interviewees were presented and negotiated during the pre-interview phase. I do so by analysing our pre-interview interactions, drawing links between my assigned identities, asymmetries between myself and the research subjects, and the risks and gains identified by them for their participation or non-participation in the research. In the field, I was considered a journalist, a writer and more interestingly, an undercover agent from Kenya's Criminal Investigation Department. No pre-fieldwork training had or could have prepared me for these assigned identities.

The question of identity or identities is central to this paper and it would be difficult to discuss and analyse aspects of my South Coast ethnography in a meaningful way without references to my personal background. It therefore makes sense to briefly present some aspects of my identity that were relevant to this study. I was raised in different parts of multi-ethnic, urban and rural Kenya. After graduating from a Kenyan public university, I emigrated to the EU, and later pursued postgraduate education in Gender studies and Development studies in two European countries. At the time I was preparing for my first field trip, I was in my ninth year of living and studying in Europe.

When I begun my fieldwork, the South Coast region was neither unfamiliar nor fully familiar to me. It is my birth region and over the years I had returned to visit close family relations living in Mombasa and other parts of the North Coast. Before the fieldwork I had also spent two vacations at a friend's home in the South Coast, which gave me an opportunity to make some pertinent observations.

During the fieldwork, therefore, my self-perception was that of being both an insider and an outsider. By insider, I am referring to my general familiarity with Kenya, the coastal region and its social organization, some Kenyan languages, beaches and general way of life.[1] By outsider, I refer to my unfamiliarity with, for instance, certain parts of the South Coast and aspects of cultural beliefs and practices that shaped the everyday lives of the men whose experiences I sought to understand. I also view my outsiderness in the perception that people I approached may have had about me as '*Mbara*',[2] i.e. as someone from Nairobi or from elsewhere in the country who is not a member of the Mijikenda, Swahili or other indigenous coastal communities. This outsiderness could also have been perceived through my non-Kenyan residency status by those who were aware of it.

Structure and scope

In what follows, I start by highlighting my motivations for researching the phenomenon in question. I then give a short description of the fieldwork in terms of the study context, participants and methodology adopted.[3] I also provide a glimpse of my theoretical inspirations, before moving on to tease out aspects of the political

economy of beach work, asymmetries between myself and the intended participants, identities assigned to me, their concerns and interests and the negotiations that took place between us. Finally, I conclude that the identities assigned to me, and those the target interviewees feared I would assign to them, reflect their experiences with different power systems: the power of the press, the power of the West, the power of the state. I suggest that researchers who are preparing for fieldwork could try anticipating their human subjects' concerns and interests in much the same way that they would hypothesize research findings, and that they be open to active, ethical and empathetic negotiations.

Motivations for researching male beach workers

My general familiarity with the subject of 'beach boys' stems from childhood vacations spent with family relations in Mombasa, but my interest in the subject developed from articles I read while preparing a term paper. Researching and writing the paper brought back forgotten memories of my 15-year-old cousin's transition into a beach boy in the late 1980s. I had a particular memory of him flaunting a lot of German words (mostly swear words) and making proud references to '*mzungu wangu*' (my European), when relating the afternoons he escaped to the beach. The pre-adolescent that I was at the time did not fully understand the possible sexual-economic dimension of his beach encounters and considered it wishful thinking on his part.

I noted that the phenomenon seemed to have suddenly gained visibility. Further research led me to the concept of 'romance tourism', in use by some journalists and scholars and critiqued by others.[4] In academia, the concept had been introduced by Pruitt and LaFonte, according to whom the term was best suited for defining relations they studied between visiting Western women and Jamaican men, because the participants subjectively considered themselves emotionally involved and viewed their relationships in courtship terms. Hence the authors' conclusions that these were amorous, long-term relationships, which made them different from those within (male) sex tourism (1995: 423). Considered against the stark asymmetries between foreign white female tourists and Kenyan men at the coast and against social inequalities in Kenya, the concept of 'Romance Tourism' for me, seemed out of touch with reality.

When I chose to focus on these beach relationships for my doctoral research, I was struck by the contradiction between its very conspicuous presence on the coast and the very little attention it attracted from Kenyan scholars. Apart from research carried out by Kibicho (2004, 2009) in Malindi, a touristic holiday resort in Kenya's coastal region, I was unaware of any in-depth research conducted on the Kenyan coast. Paucity of academic reflections on the subject was complemented by a tendency to simplify the phenomenon. This is exemplified in an article by a Kenyan academic, who noted that 'Female tourists are also coming to Kenya to meet with the local beach boys and promoting male prostitution' (Omondi, 2003: 5). Prostitution being a morally charged word and the view that this was

but another form of prostitution, and that the Kenyan men involved were being lured into it by female tourists, left room for me to engage with the complexities of the phenomenon in question.

In press media, while the social profiles of Kenyan men involved in these relationships varied, what seemed constant were their polar representations. They were construed as both opportunists and victims of (older) relatively wealthier white women (cf. Clarke, 2007; Ombara, 2007; Pohl, 2002). They were presented as relatively poor young black men, fathers and husbands who as a means of subsistence or gaining access to external displays of social mobility, took advantage of the sexual longings of foreign white women or consented to unions of convenience. There is no denying that these scholarly observations and press representations are manifestations of societies' efforts to construct understandings of a seemingly new phenomenon; however, they do tend to isolate the actors and their practices from their wider social, economic and political contexts. I expected that a deeper understanding of these relationships could be generated by focusing not only on the two main participants but also on the social relations they have beyond each other, as well as their economic and political environments.

Fieldwork and research methodology

The fieldwork was spread out between 2009 and 2011 and took place in Galu and Diani areas, situated in the touristic South Coast region. Contact with the men I sought to interview was initially facilitated by Muza,[5] a man in his mid-20s who was himself a beach worker. The first interviewees were comprised of Kenyan men aged between 26 and 39 years, who earned their living from working on the South Coast beaches. They were not a homogeneous group and could be described as local men who were born and grew up on the South Coast (predominantly of Digo ethnicity), North Coasters (predominantly Digo but including men from non-Mijikenda coastal communities) who were born and raised in the North Coast and later moved to the South Coast, or long-range migrants (predominantly of Samburu and Maasai ethnicities). The second group of interviewees was comprised of beach workers, officials of beach workers' associations, hotel managers, hotel animators and foreign white women residing in the Galu-Diani area.

During the field research I made use of four main research methods. Three involved direct contact with the research subjects; one was concerned with gaining an understanding of the phenomenon and tourism in general, through the Kenyan press. I combined participant observation,[6] life-story narratives, in-depth interviews, and was on the lookout for Kenyan press articles featuring beach workers and coastal tourism.

Exchanges with beach workers were predominantly in Kiswahili (the national and official language) and English (the second official language) but also in Sheng, a slang-based language that is mostly spoken by the youth in urban areas and has influences from Kiswahili, English and other Kenyan languages. Twenty out of the

twenty-one interviews with the male beach workers were carried out in Kiswahili and Sheng and one in English, with some code mixing with Kiswahili.[7]

As I found out through the initial field research, 'beach boys' on the Kenyan South Coast are in most cases adult men who are self-employed in a range of tourism-related jobs. A majority were supporting wives, children and other family relations. As beach workers they serve tourists in a variety of ways. Officially, some sell curio items, organize boat trips for viewing of marine life or game viewing safaris to national parks and reserves, while others perform dances for guests in hotels. Unofficially, they act as local culture and tour guides, offering tourists guided tours of their shopping centres and home villages. Some run simple beach bars where tourists can sip drinks and relax while at the beach. Others also act as shopping proxies for foreign visitors in need of items, ranging from typically Kenyan souvenirs like popular Kenyan music CDs to drugs. Many are ready to go fishing and prepare a meal of fresh sea food for clients, climb palm trees and prepare coconut drinks, and perhaps establish sexual-economic relationships with foreign female tourists as well as non-sexual economically motivated friendships with tourists.

Theoretical inspirations

Researchers' field relations with their study subjects are shaped by numerous factors. Among them, the most pertinent would be the dynamic interplay of intersections of their and their study participants' social attributes,[8] their statuses as insiders, outsiders or insider-outsiders as well as the sensitive or non-sensitive status of their inquiries. In many different ways, researchers' reflections on their field experiences[9] have shown that when analysing the dynamics of power between researchers and study participants, the impact of any one of these factors cannot be evaluated in a meaningful way if considered independently from each other and from the context. Hence, my analysis seeks to embrace the comprehensiveness recommended by Pini (2005) who, in developing ideas by Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001), succinctly observes that in order to better understand the impact of gender in one's research, a more sophisticated analysis that explores the intersections of 'who is asking whom what and where' is necessary. Stretching this over my interviewee recruitment phase, I now analyse how asymmetries between me (*who*) and the target participants (*whom*), led to the generation and attribution of alternative competing identities within the South Coast context (*where*).

Political economy of beach work on Kenya's South Coast

Tourism is Kenya's second most important foreign exchange earner and coastal tourism a significant tourist attraction and foreign exchange contributor. The number of foreign visitors to Kenya and earnings from tourism have been on the rise since the early post-independence years (KNBS, 2004, 2012).[10] As foreign-owned hospitality and tourism-related establishments increased over the years through the implementation of numerous economic policies, so did the

number of under-educated, unemployed young men on the beaches, trying to earn a living from goods and services offered to tourists. Inevitably, petty and violent crimes targeting tourists (that included theft, fraud and drug dealing) and the persistence of men peddling goods and/or services on the beaches left tourists feeling insecure and harassed. Containing 'beach boys' became a regional and national concern and the formal structuring of beach work and beach workers deemed indispensable by the government, hospitality establishments and beach workers.

Following meetings involving representatives of these three parties, increasing numbers of beach workers organized themselves into occupational associations whose codes of conduct defined their presence and behavior on the beaches.[11] Over the years, beach workers have managed to secure a place as stake holders of beach tourism (albeit unequal), alongside private hospitality establishments and the State. However, changing the public's negative image and perception of them as a group, has remained a challenge to beach workers in the face of a corrupt and coercive tourist police force,[12] hotels and tourism establishments that constantly lobby against their presence on the beaches, and local self-seeking politicians who instrumentalize beach workers' concerns for their political careers.

From a socio-economic perspective the Diani-Galu region is heavily dependent on tourism. Hotels, supermarkets, restaurants, leisure and entertainment establishments are the main formal employers in the South Coast. Aside from managers, hotel personnel include chefs, receptionists, animators, waiters, cleaners, housekeepers, security personnel and gardeners. Although one would expect to find large numbers of local (South Coast) inhabitants formally employed in these commercial and hospitality establishments, this is not at all the case. In reality, employees in these businesses generally come from other parts of the country. This can partly be explained by the low levels of formal education attained by most men and women indigenous to the South Coast region. For example, out of the 15 local men I interviewed, only one had completed secondary school. Among the remaining 14, some had completed primary school education but did not attend secondary school, while some had received little or no primary school education. This seriously limits their chances of finding employment in hotels or other formal tourism-oriented businesses. This limitation also applies to a large majority of women from the region.

Numerous foreign residents live comfortably on revenue earned from seasonal holiday rentals such as villas, cottages and apartments that stand conspicuously along the beaches and slightly further inland. Kenyans are for the most part engaged in small-scale entrepreneurial activities that are easy to spot along the Diani main road. A majority are migrants from other parts of the country. Men and women hold makeshift stalls selling varieties of soapstone and wood carvings, batiks, Maasai and Samburu inspired traditional shields, spears and beaded jewellery. Others work as wood artisans, taxi drivers and fruit and vegetable sellers. Work performed by the subjects of my research on the beaches is part of this informal economy.

As elsewhere in the country, social inequalities in the region are accentuated by inequities in land distribution. In the coastal region large tracts of land are owned by foreigners, prominent politicians and absentee landlords, while 130,000 households[13] are considered squatters on land that has been occupied by them and their families for several generations.[14] It is with this background that one could understand the general view held by beach workers and their communities, that South Coast tourism principally benefits private foreign investors, politicians, state coffers and migrants from other parts of the country, while side-lining indigenous inhabitants of the region.

Asymmetries, stakes and negotiations between researcher and study participants

I met Muza while watching over my daughter and nephews playing on the beach, on my first day in Galu. He walked up to us, initiated conversion by politely saying hello and then sat down to play with the children on the sand as we conversed. I listened as he spontaneously narrated aspects of his family background and reasons for his presence on the beach. I did not make any effort to steer the conversation in a particular direction. In the course of our exchange, he mentioned having a brother and some former beach acquaintances living in the European Union. He explained that all had emigrated as a result of friendships they had established with foreign white tourist women. At this point he knew nothing about my study. As we were getting ready to leave the beach, I explained that I would probably request his assistance for some school-related work that I had come to do in the area. We did not make any particular arrangements to meet, knowing that we were bound to meet on the beach in the days that followed. We met rather unexpectedly the next day as I was strolling along a different part of the beach. I told him about my studies and explained my interest in the men working on the beaches. He expressed enthusiasm about helping me find interviewees and promised to put me in touch with his friends and other beach acquaintances.

This relatively 'easy entry into the field' came as a surprise to me, since I had expected that I would have to wade through several encounters, before finding a willing participant or facilitator. What could explain Muza's spontaneous consent? What was in it for him? Generally informants agree to participate in studies because, consciously or unconsciously, they may want something in return. They may be seeking validation about their efforts or their personhood, looking for information or may simply wish to talk to a willing listener as a means of unburdening, sorting things out or overcoming fear or shame (Corbin and Morse, 2003: 342).

Like most researchers, I did not ask Muza and the participants the reasons behind their consent, and although Corbin's and Morse's observations apply to my encounter with Muza, I would offer an additional hypothetical answer that highlights the specificity of the context. Muza's openness and spontaneous consent to assist me may have been shaped by the strong competition for tourists that is

present among beach workers. The number of beach workers significantly exceeds that of tourists venturing onto the beaches, and the men often need to seize and adapt themselves to whatever opportunities that come their way. They are often quick to initiate contact in efforts to establish rapport with visitors, who above all, are perceived as potential clients. On our first encounter Muza was at his work place (the beach), and I, in the company of my family, seemed to be on holiday. If he had not initiated contact, it is very likely that another beach worker would have, and the opportunity to sell a good or a service would have been lost. I turned out to be a researcher and that was advantageous for him in a different way, and in the true spirit of beach work he adapted himself to my research needs.

I met the first interviewees through Muza; they appeared to generally appreciate him. He introduced them to me individually and organized to have them meet me as a group. I took some time to explain what my research was about, during the group meeting and during individual meetings. I explained that I was there, to try to understand the lives of the men working on the beaches and especially the experiences of those who have, or have had relationships with foreign female tourists.

In her chapter on 'Narrating Sensitive Topics', Hydén observes that a researcher dealing with a sensitive topic is always at a risk of the interviewees positioning her/him as superior to them. She attributes this superior positioning to the possibility that the interviewees' narratives might include issues that they are ashamed of, those that are considered degenerate in their social environment, or events that have left them vulnerable. She warns that such explicit positioning may generate resistance from an interviewee, that is manifested in avoidance of different kinds that could seriously limit the research (2008: 123). During my interviewee recruitment phase, my expectations related to sensitivity, positioning and avoidance played out in unexpected ways.

Sex and sexuality being relatively taboo subjects in Kenyan society and the fact that I was a woman going to interview men on sexual-economic relationships had made me consider my research as potentially sensitive. However, from as early as my first informal encounter with the men, it was emphasized that these relationships were clearly defined as livelihood strategies and were accepted as such by their families and communities at large. Consequently, the sensitivity, shame and uneasiness that I had expected would be present in our exchanges seemed absent.

A potentially undermining difference was the education gap between us; it would best be understood if viewed against the background of patriarchal dominance that is characteristic of Kenyan society. From informants I learnt that through my academic pursuits in Europe, my migrant status contrasted strongly, first, with that of a large majority of women from the coastal region, who tend to travel and settle in European countries principally as a result of sexual-economic relations with foreign male tourists. Second and more generally, my gender status stood in contrast with that of contemporary middle-class urban Kenyan women, who are certainly well educated, but not beyond a point unattained by a large majority of the dominant gender.

While I did not perceive beach workers as explicitly positioning me as superior in relation to our formal education gap, in the initial meeting and in the course of subsequent interviews, some of the local men expressed the idea that '*Beachi ni university*' (The beach is a university). They explained that they have always considered the beach to be a place of higher learning, where they learn a lot about life. They expressed the view that formal education needed, and was built on, knowledge that was generated from people's life experiences. To some, the fact that I had come requesting them to share their experiences underscored this point. It would seem that their reference to the beach as a university may have been some kind of implicit negotiation, through which the value of their life experiences and knowledge was underscored and the educational gap between us de-emphasized.

Beach workers' focus on my social status was not so much in relation to my academic level but more on my emigrant status. In Kenya as in numerous other developing countries, emigration to the Global North is highly prized, and Europe and North America generally perceived as places offering better life chances and opportunities for wealth accumulation. Travel and/or residency abroad is by many perceived as signalling membership or transition to a higher social class. In the South Coast this is particularly pronounced. For example, on learning that I did not live in Kenya, one beach worker I met on the beach said to me, 'I'm surprised you are even talking to me'. He then went on to explain that when most local women meet foreign white men and move to Europe or elsewhere beyond the African continent, on return visits they haughtily refused to speak with some of the persons they knew from their former lives in the area. He explained this as motivated by arrogance and the belief that they now belonged to a higher social class, hence their efforts to show this to certain persons known to them in their former lives.

The combination of my identity as an EU resident, a Kenyan PhD student living in Europe and at times Nairobi resident meant that I had *spatial power*. By this I mean the relative ability to move freely geographically and virtually. This ability is hinged on a relative socio-economic capability and technological know-how. This was in significant contrast to the beach workers' situations. For most of them, mobility was limited not only internationally but also within Kenya itself. As an example, even Nairobi, the capital city appeared to be as much a mythical place as the Western countries some aspired to visit. Their access to and know-how of internet and computer technologies were equally limited. Against this background, my status as a Kenyan emigrant was for me a concern similar to a double-edged sword. Being Kenyan could offer a point of entry, enabling me to establish rapport with the target participants. However, my emigrant status could also create distance where I expected cultural closeness would facilitate entry. As I will show further along, hesitation and avoidance stemmed from both local and migrant beach workers' concerns over our differential access to space, technology and the potential abuse of power it could yield.

I now detail the potential risks and gains as identified by the men during the pre-interview phase. I relate their apprehension over how they could be represented in

my work, the dynamic identities they assigned me and the negotiations we engaged in, prompted by a shared concern over possible or actual inaccurate representations.

Loss of sources of livelihood

As a first stake, I consider the men's uneasiness over my potential misuse of the information they would provide. They were concerned that I would misrepresent them as individual beach workers and as an occupational group, by producing negative representations related to their interactions with tourists. This could then pose a threat to their livelihoods. For example, during an individual introductory meeting I had with Willi, his concern was that the data generated would be published by the media and would expose their experiences with female tourists in fallacious or negative ways to the world.[15] He said this would in turn endanger their sources of subsistence. Most of the other local men I later interviewed also echoed this concern.

It also became clear that he strongly entertained the idea that I was a journalist passing myself off as an academic, and so did other men I later met. Indeed, since 2007, there has been increased media coverage on relationships between foreign female visitors and Kenyan men on the Coast. With this in mind, I did my best to put them at ease by justifying my academic identity, reiterating that the research was entirely academic and that none of the generated data would be submitted to the press. I also emphasized that I would respect their right to anonymity and confidentiality and would substitute their real names, alter and/or avoid disseminating any other information through which they could be identified. Finally, Willi did agree to an interview the next day, during which he freely expressed his thoughts, observations and critiques on general aspects of beach encounters, inequalities and privileges in these relationships and the politics of beach tourism. However, he maintained a guarded stance when narrating his personal experiences.

Personal and cultural misrepresentations

A second related stake concerned possible personal and cultural misrepresentations. Some of the migrant beach workers, notably those of Maasai and Samburu ethnicity, wanted to know whether I intended to write a novel that I would then sell. As we talked, I learned that this concern originated from the publication and film production of a widely read and viewed autobiography, *The White Maasai* (Hofmann, 2005), that narrates a Swiss-German woman's encounter and marital relationship with a Samburu man and her life among the Samburu. They particularly contested the representations of Maasai and Samburu cultures as presented in the film version that they considered as grossly inaccurate. They also expressed outrage at the fact that the author was earning income from the sale of a book that in their views disrespected her former Samburu husband's right to privacy.

They further explained that they were reluctant to be interviewed by me because some of them had previously been interviewed by a European male journalist and others by a young European woman who had introduced herself to them as a university student (they seemed to doubt her student status). A majority of them did not have internet access and know-how, and were later on shocked to learn that accounts of their lives had been published on websites on the internet. I could partly relate with their concerns: How could they be certain that in the many different spaces I had easy access to, I was really the doctoral student I claimed to be and not a writer or a journalist? How could they be sure that their narratives would not be disseminated and interpreted out of context? As Gready observes, 'To speak or be spoken for is not a one-off event but a process spanning various narrations, interpretations and re-interpretations, the telling and the representation and reception of telling' (2008: 138).

My request for interviews with them was met with a lively debate, after which Abraham, a man in his early 30s, seemingly speaking on behalf of the other men, assigned me an insider identity by saying: 'We'll talk to you because you are one of us. If we cannot talk to you with confidence, then whom can we talk to?' In the days that followed, I had lengthy interviews and informal conversations with three out of the five men. Although Abraham had also agreed to an interview and made appointments thrice, it became obvious that he was still very hesitant. Two of the men whom I had already interviewed kept me updated on his state of mind: 'I met him earlier today. He has agreed to talk to you. That's good. He looks like a simple man on the beach, but he has a lot of experience and is also a very wealthy man.' They also hinted that he had been in a relationship with a foreign female tourist that did not work out in the long term.

Foucault considered that there are no power relations without resistance, which in its multiple forms resides in the same place as power (1990). This seems to be reflected in our negotiations during the pre-interviewee phase: Abraham did not turn up for any of the appointments we made. Sensing that he felt uncomfortable each time we met at the beach, I insisted that he neither feel obliged to interview with me nor take an appointment for a formal interview. I proposed that if we met spontaneously and he felt like it, then we would do it. It is with a sigh of relief that he acknowledged that he 'felt bad' about the cancellations, and that I had 'freed' him. Even during this period of hesitation we nevertheless had some informal exchanges, through which he and his friends enabled me to understand their reasons for migrating seasonally to the South Coast. I got to understand the reasons behind this migration involving primarily men, and the fraternal social organization the migrant men constructed, even hundreds of kilometres away from their home areas. I also came to understand that Abraham was one of the men whose stories were published on the internet, an experience that seemed to have left him hurt and wary.

When Abraham announced his group's consent to interview with me it is likely that they expected that, as a Kenyan woman, I was globally more aware of their social and economic challenges, the socio-economic significance of their presence on the beaches and consequently would be sensitive to their concerns

about representation. My assigned insider identity was therefore clearly linked to my nationality-gender-student identity, which was considered in opposition to those of the two Europeans whom the men were acquainted with in the past. But what, then, could explain Abraham's hesitation and decision not to participate? It is possible that while *they* as a group had assigned me an insider identity, his past experiences with online press sensationalism and our differences in spatial power staggered his confidence in the student-researcher I claimed to be.

'What can we expect?': Reciprocity in concrete terms

Against the background of social inequalities in Diani and Galu and my emigrant status, I was conscious that potential interviewees would perceive me as a socially privileged person. Undeniably, there were gaping socio-economic disparities between them and I. Whereas a majority of the men led a hand-to-mouth existence and had extremely modest living arrangements, as a Kenyan studying and living in Switzerland and France, I had a relatively comfortable situation during my field stay, despite being on a self-financed student budget. It therefore did not come as a surprise when the group of local men whom I met at the start of my fieldwork, expressed interest in the concrete financial returns of their involvement in my research. Considering my status as a budding academic and theirs as potential interviewees, they wanted to know: 'Given that we are going to give you information and we are in a way going to contribute to building you, what can we expect?' This was an issue I had had time to think through, prior to starting the field research. I had considered that it did make ethical sense to compensate the interviewees, since the time they would spend interviewing with me would be time spent away from their places of work, which possibly would mean lost earnings. However, I did explain that as a student I had a small budget and that I was, above all, conscious of the fact that the monetary compensation I could give would neither be proportional to the value of the information they would provide nor to its potential impact on my future.

None of the men asked to know in advance the amount of the compensation. They expressed satisfaction with the issue having been discussed beforehand and we then took appointments for interviews. It would seem that, to them, what was important was the reciprocity between them and myself and not so much the market value of the compensation offered. I infer this from my understanding that their behaviour did not conform to what is typical of market relations in Kenya. Bargaining is an institution in Kenyan market relations, but they did not bargain. Furthermore, upon receiving gifts, Kenyans generally do not unwrap the packages or unseal envelopes there and then. Gifts are accepted, the giver thanked and the gifts set aside to be opened in the absence of the giver. The compensation that I offered at the end of the interviews was received in this same way. By doing so, they defined our reciprocity as one that was based not on a market economy but on gift exchange.[16] Each of us simultaneously became a gift giver and a gift taker.

Conversely, Kesoi and James, who are migrant beach workers, told me from the start that they did not expect compensation. Both described themselves as religious

Christians, and their spiritual values were reflected in our field relations. For instance, the day before Kesoi and I met for the interview, some of his friends had lightly suggested that they would agree to interviews if I bought them lunch at a nearby, relatively high priced beach bar. When I met Kesoi for an interview the next day, he denounced his friends' suggestions as '*tamaa*' (greed) and was not in favor of us going to the beach bar. He was adamant on giving me 'information free of charge' and preferred to interview on the beach. He made references to my student status and his wish to assist me in my studies. Later on, after the interview and informal exchanges, I asked to buy some of the beaded items he sold, as a token of my appreciation. Conversationally, he explained that he found it difficult to overprice the articles, as he normally did for foreign tourists.[17] His reluctance to overprice the goods was hinged on his religious convictions on selfless giving but equally on my assigned insider-Kenyan-student identity.

While the reasons behind these men's consent to participate in my study may have differed across the participants, what is certain is that creating rapport was essential, and it slowly gave way to attempts at trust building that varied across the different subjects. This process was facilitated by several factors. First, I was introduced to the first group by someone they seemed to generally appreciate. Second, I shared and validated their views on the complementarity of formal and informal education. Third, it may have been reassuring for participants to know that I was well aware of issues related to the sensationalized aspect of beach workers' relationships with foreign tourist women. Our exchange on the *White Maasai,* the press and my emphasis on my interest being in their subjective experiences as beach workers distinguished my motivations and interests. Also, there was reciprocity: I listened and responded to their concerns related to misrepresentations, possible loss of sources of subsistence and their interest in compensation. Finally, I offered compensation in a way that suited their personal values.[18]

Risk of arrest

As I have shown so far, the subjects of my research assigned me numerous identities: journalist, writer, 'one of us' – insider, budding academic. There was indeed a dynamic process through which the men actively attempted to make sense of my intentions or perceived vested interests and it yielded multiple competing identities of myself.

In the weeks that followed, Muza light-heartedly informed me that his brother and other men were convinced that I was a CID agent (from the Criminal Investigation Department in Nairobi). He was cautioned against being in my company because rumour had it that I was probably working undercover to identify drug users, dealers and their networks among and through beach workers. Muza's response was to continually refute such claims, while humorously stating that maintaining friendly relations with a CID agent in no way constituted a crime. Since I was aware of drug use among beach workers in general, I understood this constructed outsider identity as signalling fear of possible arrest.

Why was I considered a CID agent? It is possible that I was perceived through my urban-Kenyan woman-migrant status, and my practices did not allow beach workers and other social actors to situate me within the expected gender roles and occupations. First, it is worth noting that in the South Coast in general, local women do not spend much time on the beaches, and one rarely sees them strolling alone on the beach. The women one is likely to see on certain parts of the beach are often non-Mijikenda entrepreneurs from other parts of the country. Some of them sell crafts or textiles at fixed spots along beach access roads, while others offer massage services to tourists in small shacks that are built somewhat out of sight.[19]

As a researcher, African, non-Mijikenda woman, I was spending time talking and sitting with male beach workers and walking along the beach, hence exhibiting 'male autonomy'. My relation with space on the beach may have been interpreted and checked against a tacit gender expectation: 'Women sit and wait, men walk and search'. My behaviour was therefore more in line with that of male beach workers than with that of female beach workers.

Second, it is very likely that I was identified as a Kikuyu[20] and may have been considered not only a *Mbara* but also as one who 'belongs' to the country's politically and economically dominant ethnic community. The combination of my freedom with space on the beach, my formal and informal information gathering activities and this ethnic identification may have played a role in the construction of my undercover agent identity.

Finally, one could also wonder why Muza and other men disregarded my assigned CID agent identity. Aside from the many discussions we had had that may have helped challenge the validity of this identity, it would seem that Muza did not feel concerned by it because he was acquainted with my 'private sphere'. For many researchers going to do fieldwork in their home/birth countries, 'homecoming' (Oriola and Haggerty, 2012) provides opportunities for visiting or spending time with family. For me it provided an opportunity to travel with my daughter to Kenya and spend some time with my mother and other members of my family. Muza had met some members of my family, knew our temporary place of residence and with Diani and Galu being relatively small, so had some other men. It is therefore very likely that they considered that an undercover agent would not expose her family to the persons she sought to infiltrate.

Conclusion

I have discussed and analysed my experiences with research subjects I sought to interview during my fieldwork in Kenya's South Coast region. I have highlighted the socio-economic asymmetries between us, as well as my target interviewees' personal and group concerns with representations, possible loss of sources of subsistence, the risk of arrest and interest in compensation. These concerns and interests were reflected in the identities that were constructed in the course of our pre-interview interactions: journalist, writer, undercover police agent, student/budding researcher.

The first three identities and those that the men thought I would assign to them through my study were a risk for the subjects and me, and their deconstruction required our joint participation, which took the form of direct and indirect negotiations. They did not assign me these identities because I specifically gave them reasons to doubt I was who I claimed to be: a student researcher who was interested in their subjective experiences as beach workers. These identities were for the most part a product of their past and everyday experiences with social power and inequities. They reflect their dynamic experiences with different power systems: the power of the press, the power of the West, the power of the state.

Overall, the intended interviewees showed they were not passive subjects of my research. For them, participation in the study necessitated reciprocity, resistance and building levels of trust. The exchanges and negotiations I have described show that trust is not a given; it is built to different degrees in processes that researchers and study subjects agree to participate in.

Identities are dynamic and unique to every research context, as are contextual stakes. Consequently, no form of one-size-fits-all pre-field training could adequately prepare researchers for future negotiations with their research subjects. It all has to be experienced on site and the best one can do is to be open to active, empathetic and ethical participation. However, perhaps researchers preparing for fieldwork could attempt to anticipate their human subjects' concerns and interests in much the same way that they would hypothesize research findings.

Finally, giving a voice and visibility to one's interviewees may be perceived as being morally just. Nevertheless, it in no way deflects from the existent inequalities between researchers and their prospective study participants. Prior consideration of asymmetries and research context would undoubtedly help to better anticipate subjects' concerns and interests.

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Notes

1. Some scholars use the term 'Native researcher'. For me, this terminology is heavily imbibed with a colonial past and the rigidity reflected in a supposed native identity is problematic. Conversely, 'insider', 'outsider' and 'insider-outsider', if not presented as clear-cut positions but rather as characterized by dynamism and contextual ambiguities, would seem more suitable (cf. Narayan, 2003, who has discussed this at length).
2. A Kiswahili word used specifically at the coast.
3. My research aims and the research context are highlighted in as much as would be necessary to understand the content of this article. However, I do not discuss my research findings, as this would go beyond the aims of the paper.

4. Journalists and academics in favour of the concept include Belliveau (2006), Pruitt and LaFonte (1995) and Dahles and Bras (1999). Critiques are present in Heinrich (2007), De Moya et al. (2001) and Sanchez Taylor (2001).
5. All names have been altered for anonymity.
6. I observed, talked and walked with the male beach workers, made small purchases of goods they sold and took part in their daily informal beach gatherings. I also struck up conversations with tourists in my places of residence and persons working informally or formally in the tourism sector.
7. Those with the six hotel managers and four hotel animators took place in English, with occasional code mixing with Kiswahili. Informal conversations with foreign tourist women and two interviews with foreign women were in English, with some code mixing with German.
8. Notably gender, age, class, race, ethnicity and nationality, among others.
9. Cf. Ergun and Erdemir (2010), Mazzei and O'Brien (2009), Pini (2005), Grenz (2005), Ispa-Landa (2006), Soilevuo Grønnerød (2004), Jacobs-Huey (2002), Zaman (2008), Ergun and Erdemir (2010), Oriola and Haggerty (2012), Renzetti and Lee (1993), Corbin and Morse (2003).
10. There have been periods in the past (1992–4, 2007–8) when social-political unrest in the country did generate significant drops in the number of tourists.
11. Not all male beach workers have joined these occupational associations and many still operate unofficially.
12. An additional measure included the creation of a special police force dedicated to curbing crime targeting tourists.
13. These statistics appear in a Kenyan newspaper (*Daily Nation*, 28 August 2013) and are said to have been sourced from official government records. An earlier undated official document prepared by the Ministry of lands after 2009 put the figure at '128,900 heads of squatters' (Ministry of Lands, n.d.).
14. cf Kanyinga (2000) and Syagga (2011) for a more comprehensive view of land distribution inequalities in the coastal region.
15. This would be related to some men's quest for sexual-economic relationships with foreign female visitors.
16. See Mauss (1966), whose essay focuses on how relationships between people are constructed through the exchange of objects.
17. We solved this when I took the initiative to overprice the articles.
18. Kesoi and James perceived direct compensation as a violation of their Christian values. Purchasing crafts they sold provided a subtle shift from direct compensation.
19. Some are also open to providing sexual services.
20. Principally through my name.

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