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Chaim Noy

During the past two decades we have witnessed a rather impressive growth of theoretical innovations and conceptual revisions of epistemological and methodological approaches within constructivist-qualitative quarters of the social sciences. Methodological discussions have commonly addressed a variety of methods for collecting and analyzing empirical material, yet the critical grounds upon which these were reformulated have rarely been extended to embrace sampling concepts and procedures. The latter have been overlooked, qualifying only as a 'technical' research stage. This article attends to snowball sampling via constructivist and feminist hermeneutics, suggesting that when viewed critically, this popular sampling method can generate a unique type of social knowledge—knowledge which is emergent, political and interactional. The article reflects upon researches about backpacker tourists and marginalized men, where snowball sampling was successfully employed in investigating these groups' organic social networks and social dynamics. In both studies, interesting interrelations were found between sampling and interviewing facets, leading to a reconceptualization of the method of snowball sampling in terms of power relations, social networks and social capital.

Introduction

> Where is the Knowledge we have lost in information? (T. S. Eliot, *The Rock*)

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During the past two decades we have witnessed a rather fantastic evolution of theoretical innovations and thorough conceptual revisions of various epistemological and methodological domains within constructivist-qualitative quarters of the social sciences. Methodological discussions have commonly addressed a variety of methods for collecting and analyzing empirical material, as illustrated in scores of introductory qualitative textbooks and course curriculum. Yet the epistemological grounds on which these have been reformulated have yet to embrace sampling concepts and procedures. Rarely has the 'qualitative turn' considered the hermeneutic contextualization of *sampling procedures* (Curtis, Gesler, Smith, & Washburn, 2000). Sampling has been literally overlooked, qualifying as the least 'sexy' facet of qualitative research. Yet sampling procedures are unique facets within any paradigm within which empirical research is pursued. Both inevitable and invaluable, these procedures amount to crucial moments within the overall research design; moments where the type of contact between researcher(s) and informants is conceptualized—to be later embodied.

This state of affairs might be due to the fact that sampling procedures seem too technical a matter for a paradigm in which scientific coordinates are the 'poetic turn,' 'negotiated texts' and 'storytellings and narratives'; or it might be because qualitative researchers employ sampling methods that are used in positivist-quantitative research, and therefore seemingly do not require reconceptualizations. In any case the fact remains that sampling has been largely 'left behind' the front lines of critical and deconstructive thought.

In an attempt to address this lacuna, I wish to explore a specific, widely used sampling procedure in this article, popularly referred to as 'snowball' or 'chain' sampling. I will attend to the snowball sampling procedure through qualitative and feminist sensibilities, so as to draw snowball sampling into or under more nuanced hermeneutics. I will argue that when sampling methods are employed in qualitative research, they lead to dynamic moments where unique social knowledge of an interactional quality can be fruitfully generated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hay, 2005; Limb & Dwyer, 2001).

The present discussion originated from reflections upon two qualitative research projects which I conducted, in which snowball sampling was employed. Both projects explored and documented groups of people whose shared social experience predominantly include movement (technologically mediated movement). While these 'people on the move' moved differently, embodying different aims and different privileges (to which I will return later), snowball sampling provided a unique way of reaching both groups, and of tracking both groups' social networks and routes of travel.

The first study dealt with experiences and recollections of backpacker tourists. In this study two groups were interviewed: one group included 44 backpackers who had recently returned from a lengthy trip, and the second group included 18 backpackers who had travelled 20 years on average before the interview. In both cases I initiated sampling via acquaintances and advertisements that I placed in locations frequented by backpackers.

Encounters with backpackers from both groups afforded lively occasions for tourists' travel-narrative performances (Elsrud, 2001; Noy, 2004). Hence interviewing was an 'easy' task: I merely had to ask for stories, and tales of adventure and of leisurely golden beaches poured forth. Accessing backpackers for the study proceeded smoothly

as well, as my subjects gladly referred me to one another, competing with each other's storytelling competences, but at the same time also complementing each other's travel worlds (Noy, 2007).

The second research project on which this article reflects explores semi-professional male drivers of low socioeconomic background, in a particular urban environment— Al-Quds/Jerusalem. The study makes use of a combination of methods of inquiry, with the aim of studying 'cultures of driving' as gendered, ethnicized and national spatial practices (Featherstone, Thrift, & Urry, 2005; Urry, 2000). In this research too I contacted acquaintances and taxi and shuttle drivers, who then refereed me to family relatives and colleagues. These men were also 'on the move,' albeit in a different way: while tourists embody the privileged experience of travelling beyond spaces of everyday life into leisure spaces and movements, the motion male drivers embody is part and parcel of mundane (hard-working, industrial) everyday urban life.

In this study, gaining access to both Palestinian and Jewish men proved to be tricky, and the interaction, too, was not as fluent as was the case with backpackers: suspicion concerning my sociocultural and political positions, on the one hand, and expectations that I would supply actual remedies to bureaucratic and other predicaments they suffered, on the other hand, complicated the processes of both approaching these men and interacting with them.

While I initially looked for information in the material produced in the interviews in these researches (i.e., the 'text'), I later realized that I could learn a great deal about both backpackers and marginalized men by reflecting upon the dynamics of *accessing or approaching* them. It was this insight, and the interrelations that then emerged between the procedures of sampling and interviewing in these projects, that led me to re-evaluate the role of snowball sampling in this article.

The arguments developed hereafter stem from my observation that snowball sampling relies on and partakes in the *dynamics of natural and organic social networks*. This is a particularly interesting dimension—one that is unique to chain methods of sampling—which carries far reaching consequences, to be discussed in terms of social capital and reproduction of social systems (Bourdieu, 1986 and Giddens, 1984, respectively). The employment of snowball sampling in organic social networks brings to the fore two relevant concepts:

(1) *Social knowledge.* Captured in the snowball sampling design, social knowledge is presently viewed as primarily dynamic, processual and emergent. In line with qualitative and feminist conceptualizations of 'knowledge,' accent is put on movement rather than on the static notion of logos.

(2) *Power relations.* Related to the notion of social knowledge is the notion of power relations which transpire between researcher(s) and researched, and between the informants themselves. This feature too is tied to the fact the snowball sampling makes use of natural social networks.

In what follows I will first supply a brief background on snowball sampling, emphasizing the method's dynamic quality. Then I will discuss the unique relationship between snowball sampling (as a 'data accessing' method) and in-depth interviewing

(as a 'data collecting' method). The aim is both theoretical and didactic: the article wishes to enrich the ways in which snowball sampling is used in research, and to suggest that this method entails unique consequences, which, when critically appreciated, can contribute an invaluable type of knowledge.

Snowballing Tactics

> I would suggest that sampling strategies involving people … are more akin to opening a Pandora's box. (Curtis et al., 2000, p. 1008)

Upon studying sampling methods in qualitative research, students commonly learn what *not to do* (see literature review in Curtis et al., 2000, p. 1002). The qualitative researcher is left to her or his own devices in the task of weighing the consequences that one or other methods of sampling will have on the research, knowing that sampling amounts to a crucial link in the research chain, which can undoubtedly 'make or break' research (McLean & Campbell, 2003). In this section, I prefer to view the sampling method, akin to other procedures employed in qualitative inquiries, as a 'tactic'—a term which I borrow from Michel de Certeau's (1984) famous work. For de Certeau, tactics are subversive and practical alternatives, through which hegemonic power can be resisted and valuable knowledge can be gained.

A sampling procedure may be defined as snowball sampling when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants. This process is, by necessity, repetitive: informants refer the researcher to other informants, who are contacted by the researcher and then refer her or him to yet other informants, and so on. Hence the evolving 'snowball' effect, captured in a metaphor that touches on the central quality of this sampling procedure: its accumulative (diachronic and dynamic) dimension.

Snowball sampling is arguably the most widely employed method of sampling in qualitative research in various disciplines across the social sciences. It is sometimes used as the main vehicle through which informants are accessed, or as an auxiliary mean, which assists researchers in enriching sampling clusters, and accessing new participants and social groups when other contact avenues have dried up. Indeed, this type of employment may partly account for this method's weak integration into mainstream qualitative work: it seems as an auxiliary and 'informal' procedure (Hendricks, Blanken, & Adriaans, 1992), one that is plain and rather commonsensical so as to avoid systematic reflexive consideration. As Atkinson and Flint (2001, p. 1) observe, it 'lies somewhat at the margins of research practice.' In addition, there is a wealth of related sampling terms and concepts, such as chain, referral, link-tracing, respondent-driven and purposive sampling, which further contribute to the lack of integration and coherence of snowball sampling (Bieranacki & Waldorf, 1981; Heckathorn, 1997; Patton, 1990; Spreen, 1992).

In various studies snowball sampling is often employed as a particularly effective tool when trying to obtain information on and access to 'hidden populations' (such as non-institutionalized drug-users: Heckathorn, 1997; Sifaneck & Neaigus, 2001; unemployed men: Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Faugier & Sargeant, 1997; AIDS carriers: Sifaneck

& Neaigus, 2001; and elders: Warren & Levy, 1991). Occasionally, snowball sampling is also used to access groups that do not suffer from stigmas and marginalization, but, to the contrary, enjoy the status of social elites (Moyser & Wagstaffe, 1987). In these cases, on which I shall elaborate later, people are 'hidden-by-choice' as it were. They are not excluded by hegemonic forces, but, being part of the hegemony, exclude themselves from the public.

In all of these studies, however, snowball sampling is employed instrumentally, as a safety net or a fall-back alternative, when other means of obtaining information (usually epidemiologic) are not feasible. Yet snowball sampling is a particularly informative procedure, which deserves to be employed *on its own right and merit*, and not as a default option. When employed in the study of social systems and networks, this sampling method delivers a unique *type of knowledge*. Hence a digression behooves us, one which will attend to social knowledge, as it is conceived by qualitative and feminist scholars.

Sampling Knowledge or where is Knowledge Located?

Contrary to the traditional notion of epistemology, which students of sampling methods and research designs readily express in class, knowledge pertaining to 'things social' is *never static or contained*. In fact, the quality of staticity with which knowledge is commonly endowed is, to a great part, a result of positivist scientific epistemologies and discourses, which have traditionally found grappling with the notion of dynamic, interactional and systemic knowledge to be a frustrating task.

This is particularly the case in sociology, where exploration and theorizing of *steady social forms* has been the leading paradigm for decades, hindering the ability to conceptualize social knowledge in a different light. In line with such thinkers as Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel de Certeau, Gilles Deleuze, Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Simmel, among others, who generally enjoyed only a limited influence in and on mainstream sociology—compared, say, with Emile Durkheim—various recent advances are made toward alternative paradigms (Featherstone, 1995; Gibbons et al., 1994; Urry, 2000). In these propositions, the weight shifts from Cartesian-positivist worldviews and metaphysics to an attempt to view social knowledge as having emergent, contingent, interactive and heterogeneous characteristics.

Innovative reconceptualizations of the static notion of social knowledge have been promoted viably also by feminist scholarship. Feminists have recognized the relations between the static doctrine, on the one hand, and hegemonic power, on the other hand, and have pointed at how central they are in western, 'logocentric' or 'phallocentric' metaphysics and their underlying ideologies (Cixous & Clément, 1986; Derrida, 1976; Irigaray, 1985). In other words, the view of knowledge as 'inhabiting' particular esteemed locales, such as libraries and scholarly (male) individuals, is understood to be a socially and ideologically constructed product of patriarchal ways of thinking, and not a natural, neutral given state, upon which critical research should be build. As Donna Haraway points out, scientific textbooks 'tell parables about objectivity and scientific method to students in the first years of their initiation, but no practitioner of

the high scientific arts would be caught dead *acting on* the textbook versions' (1988, p. 576, emphasis in the original).

Lingering modernist views of knowledge in the social realms are often raised by students in classes in which qualitative research is taught. For students taking their first steps in qualitative studies, constructivist perspectives arouse cognitive dissonance. These epistemologies contrast with the contemporary images of the academic world as inhabiting—and endowing—'hard' (objective) knowledge. The modernist bias in such cases is hard to overcome, and is particularly acute with regard to sampling procedures, which seem to be inextricably associated with the term 'statistics.' When learning how to interview, too, students typically ask how should the interviewer 'extract,' 'persuade,' 'lure,' 'obtain,' or at the very least 'elicit' information *from* research subjects (cf. Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, pp. 144–145). Knowledge is viewed statically and monologically. It is no more than information, which is contained in the minds of the informants, like pebbles in informants' pockets, awaiting a skilled researcher who will *extract* it from the subjects and *transfer* it to the research. Suggesting that knowledge is in fact dialogical, and that it is co/re-created in the course of the interview interaction, and therefore is essentially partial and continuously negotiable, is downright unnerving: it is not why most social science students have enrolled in their respective departments.
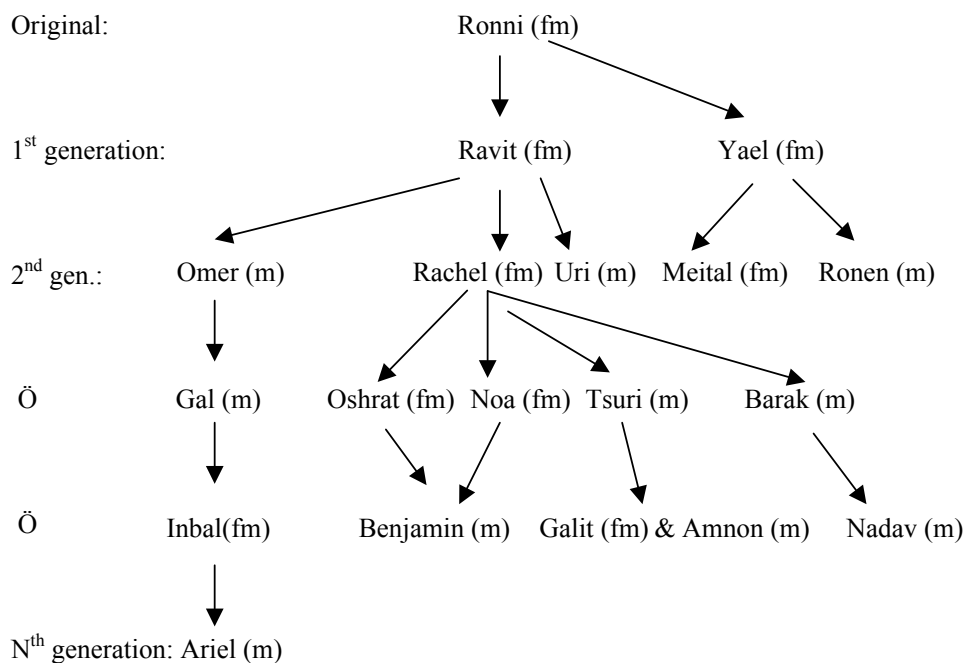
Knowledge, then, does not exist solely in an object-ive form, inside a container. When viewed in this light, sampling procedures in qualitative research are not instrumental means whose sole purpose is to enable access to knowledge. Instead, these procedures entail knowledge *in and of itself*. Snowball sampling illustrates this argument clearly: it is *essentially social* because it both uses and activates existing social networks. Attending to this dimension, ties the sampling procedure to other aspects and phases of the research. That is, when viewed holistically, different research facets amount to a gestalt where each facet contributes synergistically to the overall research design, which, in turn, can potentially generate an organic and 'thick' type of knowledge, knowledge that is so valued in the qualitative social sciences.

Snowball Stemmata: Interaction Traces

The fact that all of the information about informants available in snowball sampling is supplied solely by the informants themselves has a crucial consequence.[1] Unlike the bulk of sampling procedures and designs, in snowball sampling the researcher *relinquishes* a considerable amount of control over the sampling phase to the informants. To be sure, the researcher can direct the informants as to the identities and numbers of referents to whom they refer, and she or he may later decide who and how many of the potential informants will be contacted and to what degree they will contribute to the research. These, however, are restrictive types of decisions. Positive information is supplied solely by the informants—a state which is captured in the term 'respondent-driven' sampling (Heckathorn, 1997, as discussed above): it is the respondents who *drive* the sampling process onward.

Snowball sampling is commonly represented through 'sampling trees' or stemmata, which indicate the course of the sampling process. These graphic depictions are static

Original: Ronni (fm)

1st generation: Ravit (fm)   Yael (fm)

2nd gen.: Omer (m)   Rachel (fm) Uri (m) Meital (fm) Ronen (m)

Ö Gal (m) Oshrat (fm) Noa (fm) Tsuri (m) Barak (m)

Ö Inbal(fm) Benjamin (m) Galit (fm) & Amnon (m) Nadav (m)

Nth generation: Ariel (m)

Figure 1   Snowball Stemma.

representations of a dynamic social process, and should be approached as such. The snowball stemma presented in Figure 1 supplies an illustration of the types of information conveyed in the snowball design, some of which goes usually overlooked.

Besides the basic information conveyed by the stemma, which should include the number of referrals contacted and their basic socio-demographic attributes, in the capacity the stemma is a static depiction of a dynamic process it should convey the following types of *network information* as well: (1) 'generational' position within the stemma; (2) number of referrals supplied by every informant; (3) number of informants who referred to a particular informant; and (4) dates of interviews. The combination of 'hard' ('independent') socio-demographic information, on the one hand, and positional information ('dependent'), on the other hand, produces a wealth of contextualized social information.

For instance, the ordinal succession depicted in the stemma above can be highly relevant, because oftentimes informants who are located in subsequent 'generations' have different social attributes than those located in the beginning of the stemma. The location of the informants further ('deeper') from the initial point of contact ('surface') suggests that they are positioned differently within the social system or network that is being sampled or sampled from. Likewise, the number of referrals supplied by the informant as well as the number of informants who referred the researcher to a particular informant indicates different positions within the sampled group. These patterns can illustrate the extent to which informants are centrally located within the network. Again, although these attributes are not independent or 'hard' socio-demographic

characteristics, they can be pertinent to the research, contextualizing and hence illumi-
nating information that is supplied by informants in other research facets (such as in
the interview, to which I shall turn shortly). Additionally, repetition of cases of multiple
referrals to the same informant might indicate the overall cohesion of the social system:
more shared-referrals and cross-referrals indicate a higher degree of interpersonal
acquaintance.

Snowball Sampling and In-depth Interviewing: Toward an Integrated Research

In qualitative research, where researchers strive to generate a holistic overall inquiry, it
is important to observe how different stages of research evince interesting inter- as well
as intra-relations. While, in the previous section, intra-stage aspects were briefly
discussed, presently, interrelations between two central research procedures—'data
accessing' and 'data collecting'—are explored here in detail.

Counter to traditional methodological approaches where these phases are viewed as
divided in a discrete way, data accessing and data collecting processes are in effect
mutually dependent, and should be productively viewed as complementary facets. As
Lee (1997, p. 562) indicates from a feminist perspective: '*substantive data* and *method-
ology* are inextricably linked' (italics in the original). While the notion that these
research phases are pursued simultaneously is common wisdom in qualitative research,
rarely have any attempts been made to theorize these interrelations. Viewing research
as processual, dynamic and holistic, I promote applying a critical-reflexive perspective
upon the *entire research process*, thus avoiding the risk of missing a synergistic type of
knowledge(s) generated by intra- and inter-actions between different facets.

On a basic level, the interrelations between snowball sampling and in-depth inter-
viewing are rather obvious, and are tied to the definition of the snowball procedure:
informants whom the researcher meets are those who supply the referrals. Hence the
quality of the referring process is *naturally related* to the quality of the interaction: if the
informant leaves the interview meeting feeling discontented, or if the researcher did
not win the informant's trust and sympathy, the chances the latter will supply the
former referrals decrease (and vice versa).

On a more sophisticated level, discussing the relations between snowball sampling
and interviewing requires a brief elaboration on how informants *perceive or frame* the
interview encounter. Elsewhere, I and others have argued that the interview encounter
is a complex interaction, partly because the researcher/interviewer and the informants
hold *different perceptions* concerning the encounter. Holstein and Gubrium observe
that 'the term *informant* no longer conveys a distinct difference in narrative compe-
tence; instead it signals more a difference in point of view' (1995, p. 24; italics in the
original). In other words, both parties partaking in the interview do not necessarily
frame the meeting in the same way. At stake here is not a simple misunderstanding
which can be easily resolved during the conversation, but rather a hermeneutic discord,
which concerns a lack of mutual dialogical acknowledgment (Harding, 1987; Luff,
1999; Noy, 2004; Stromberg, 1993). Such instances illustrate the famous Geertzian
'double hermeneutic framework' (Geertz, 1983), wherein informants and researchers

see the occasions of their interactions—and, for that matter, many other social sites and cultural events as well—quite differently, in accordance with different ideologies they hold and interests they have. This disparity does not usually surface in the participants' awareness and goes unnoticed by researchers as well as by informants (Noy, 2002).

In light of Erving Goffman's (1959) early dramaturgical conceptualizations, the interview is viewed as a site of mutual and interacting presentations, where social and institutional identities are fervently experienced, negotiated and accomplished (Butler, 1993; Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Parker, 2001; Goffman, 1981; Langellier & Peterson, 2004). This perspective is particularly relevant when one explores social networks and communities (which were precisely the cases I explored, perhaps more so in the back-packers' research), where the question *who is and who is not referring others*, as well as who is and who is not being referred *by* others, assumes a significant social conse-quence, over and above the face-to-face interaction.

Because snowball sampling necessarily involves social networks, the notion of 'social capital' here is productive. The concept of social capital, so influentially developed by Bourdieu (1984, 1986), concerns various forms of highly regarded social assets, which are based in part on participation in social networks. According to Bourdieu, social capital stems from 'membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit' (1986, pp. 248–249). Informants who possess social capital and are willing to share it—or to perform and embody—with the researcher are those informants who are members in social networks, who have more friends and acquaintances than others (they maintain both tight and loose relationships), and are therefore located centrally. In snowball stemma these informants are depicted as inhabiting network junctions, where their 'network capital' (Urry, 2003) assumes a visual manifestation.

Social capital is distributed differentially within social networks, and it is this differ-ential distribution that accounts for networks' structure and dynamics. For instance, in Figure 1, the junctions in the stemma are exclusively *populated by women*. This pattern was not apparent to me in the beginning of the research, but once I recognized it, it contributed to the understanding of the social networks of which the tourists were members. Indeed, feminist research repeatedly indicates that women are usually those who do the work of maintaining and expanding social ties and relationships (whether in small-scale social systems, such as families, or in large-scale organizations; Mazali, 2001; Ruddick, 1989). I clearly recall how at the end of a few interviews with female tourists, the interviewees pulled out a sizable sheet with a contact list that included between 20 and 30 names! When I expressed my appreciation at the abundance of contact information they were able to supply, they mentioned that they were 'experi-enced' at maintaining social contact lists. One remarked causally:

> Oh, it's nothing. I'm used to keeping these types of lists of names. I've been writing these contact lists when I was in the Scouts, and later during my service in the army, where I was in charge of the social activities of a platoon.

An interactional account of the strategic location of women in the stemma above concerns power relations between researcher/interviewer and informant/interviewee

(Egharevba, 2001). From this respect, the number of referrals an interviewee supplies is likely to be related to *weaker* social standings, which, in patriarchal systems, usually correspond with women's positions. Oftentimes women are 'better' informants not because they are 'naturally' more cooperative and verbal, but also because the degree to which they can resist the research(er)'s authority is lesser.

In the study on men in marginalized social groups, the distribution of social and network capitals was not related to gender but to other variables. In this study, the interviewees are all Palestinian and Israeli (Jewish) men from peripheralized socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. I vividly recall how, toward the interviews' conclusion, I observed several key informants punching on two or three cellular phones simultaneously, retrieving the contact information they agreed to supply. These key informants/referrers can be characterized according to their status in their respective social networks, which correlates with proximity to hegemonic sociocultural centres. In other words, because the present research includes men who are of racially and ethnically marginalized backgrounds, those who come in touch with institutions and people from hegemonic centres (where economic and other capitals are located), are precisely those who are most accessible to outsiders and who posses the contact information of many others who are more distant from these centres than they are (see discussions on the 'gatekeeper bias' in ethnography, Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

Sampling and Interviewing: Dual Participation Frameworks

A third view of the interrelations between snowball sampling and in-depth interviewing concerns the notion, which I initially found puzzling, of different *patterns of participation* in research: participation as evinced in the willingness to partake in research and meet the researcher, and participation within the interview interaction, as evinced in the willingness to speak openly. In the first research project, for instance, the enthusiasm that backpackers manifested in relation to participating in interviews was reflected within the encounters themselves, via an enthusiastic *manner of participation*: all the backpackers I interviewed were 'good' informants; after I introduced myself as a psychology doctoral candidate, interested in hearing their travel experiences and stories, they all responded openly and enthusiastically to my inquiries, exhibiting high degrees of interpersonal involvement (Tannen, 1984). If there were any hesitations or reluctance on their part, these were covert and were suppressed in the lively flowing and informal interaction.

While the notion of social capital partly addresses this duality, I find Anthony Giddens' (1984) work on structuration theory specifically relevant to this discussion. Akin to Bourdieu, Giddens explores the relationship between structure and agency, or between societal processes and individual subjects. According to Giddens' structurational approach, social structures are fundamentally processual and emergent, and are a result of interactions. Particularly relevant is his notion of 'production and reproduction,' whereby through repetitive processes social systems re-create themselves: 'The structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize' (Giddens, 1984, p. 25).

We can now understand the stemma in Figure 1 as depicting interrelated interactions: at stake is not only a flowchart which consists of individuals and their names, but *nexuses of social interactions* where social agents and structures are being re-produced. The informants are '*doing* tourists' (backpackers) and I am '*doing* a researcher' (a doctoral candidate). In and through these interactions subjecthood and agency are constituted, and by the structure of the social network and system assume its form. This process, which is emergent and ephemeral, is captured and fixated in and by the stemma, in a similar way to how a snapshot freezes movement. Now the micro and the macro of society are visible.[2]

The Giddensian interdependence between agency and structure implies that similar processes (i.e., power relations) influence the dynamics of the twofold participation modes mentioned earlier (sampling and interviewing). In the backpacker study, social pressure was placed on members of the tourists' network to partake in the interview. This was, of course, performed in a friendly manner, but it is noteworthy that out of nearly 100 interviewees and potential interviewees, there was only a single case of refusal to be indicative.

While social pressures in such cohesive networks do not usually assume an explicit or oppressive form, the backpackers I interviewed were quick to indicate that there were a host of activities into which they 'persuaded,' 'pushed' and 'dragged' each other to participate. In fact, one of the early findings was precisely that backpackers used highly persuasive, sometimes downright missionary rhetoric (Noy, 2002). Hence, a refusal to partake in the research would have been potentially as disturbing to the social network as a refusal to undertake *any other performative rite* that the social group pursues. In other words, the participants in the research viewed the interview as a rite which is *as organic* to their participation in the social network as any other.

On one occasion, for instance, a female interviewee recollected with disappointment that: 'you get dragged along. What can I tell you, I too found myself at some point being dragged into all sorts of things. You get dragged along.' While the interviewee is overtly (referentially) describing social pressures she experienced during the lengthy trip to South America, what she is reflecting upon could just as well be relevant to the interview encounter. Could the interview be yet another 'thing' into which she got passively 'dragged' into? For after all, these are the very same social networks that affected her to travel, and that pressured her into engaging in various activities during the trip (the famous 'backpacker checklist'), through which I have come to contact her.

As was expected, manifestations of power relations were also evinced *within* the interviews. Although these meetings were truly pleasant and personal encounters, for the young tourists who I interviewed, being researched evoked positions they held while travelling, yet in a reverse way: when they travelled, their romantic 'tourist gaze' was set on 'native' peoples (Urry, 2002), which is how the social category of the tourist is constructed. The gaze is a political, patronizing act that infuses tourists with self-perceived prestige. Yet in the interview interactions the tourists are themselves positioned as the 'objects' of (scholarly) investigation. And regardless of the efforts taken by ethically sensitive interviewers—we repeatedly tell our students to avoid objectifications of their interviewees, do we not?—degrees of objectification

are part and parcel of the project of studying people or phenomena through inter-views (and through other methods as well, see Arendell, 1997; and more generally, Minh-Ha, 1992).

In light of this, interviews with tourists are understood as instances of interactions between two elitist social groups. Indeed, the interviewees repeatedly mentioned that during their trips they felt like anthropologists and psychologists (the former in rela-tion to the native, the latter in relation to the self), which were the disciplines I was studying at the time of the interviews, and which I introduced as part of my profes-sional identity and credentials. They stressed the fact that I should travel as they did. Only then, they claimed, will I be truly able to learn what it means to be a 'backpacker,' which was the reason I had interviewed them to begin with. In one memorable instance I interviewed a male backpacker who was a true emblem of the image of the romantic-explorer—hiking for months in the Himalayan wilderness, mostly by himself. When I expressed my wish to see the travel journals he wrote at the time, he politely declined my request. He indicated that he would gladly share these documents on the condition that I devote more time to hear his stories, to truly understand his unique experience. It was admittedly quite some time after the interview that I realized that there was a power game (one-upmanship) played here: if the researcher wants more information, the researcher should exert more efforts.

Tourism research has acknowledged that from the Grand Tour in seventeenth-and eighteenth-century Europe, occupying the symbolic position of the tourist has been regarded as a prestigious, exclusive matter (Adler, 1985; Bruner, 2005, p. 21). Post-colonial and feminist research in particular shows how the cultural capital engulfed in tourism stems from the consumption of differentially distributed rights of mobility, sightseeing and accommodation. The hierarchies by which capital is accumulated engender a distinction not only between tourists and 'natives,' but, as importantly, between different types of tourists. These contrasts are particularly true of backpackers, who primarily practice romanticist and neo-colonial ideologies in their trips to 'Third World' countries and 'primitive' cultures (Noy & Cohen, 2005; Richards & Wilson, 2004).

Interestingly, works that show backpackers' prestigious self-image, and their neo-colonial view of the 'Native,' are also those works which illuminate the heightened patters of intra-group sociability. Backpackers maintain 'intensive communities' (Binder, 2004, p. 100) and heightened patterns of social interactions and storytellings (Noy, 2005). The adventurous trip creates 'a feeling of blood brotherhood between a few "chosen ones"' (Welk, 2004, p. 82), which favorably positions the travelers against the image of a 'commercialized,' mass tourist, constructing the category of the 'anti-tourist' (Welk, 2004).

Hence, as Atkinson and Flint (2001) note, snowballing is illuminating not only in relation to marginalized, stigmatized groups. Oftentimes elitist groups, too, practice the rights and power they possess by monitoring and controlling accessibility (Moyser & Wagstaffe, 1987; Odendhal & Shaw, 2001). As the study on tourists shows, snowball sampling plays into social dynamics of accessibility in terms of power and rights: who may find and possess what type of knowledge about whom?

Images of the Researcher

A fourth and final perspective on the interrelations between snowball sampling and the interview encounter stems from the fact that the researcher herself or himself sometimes becomes a topic of discussion between network members. This occurs when informants tell each other about the interview experiences they had when they contact each other as part of the process of suggesting further referrals. Interviewees also compare notes regardless of the referral process, and discuss their performances as interview interlocutors (and in the case of narrative interviews—as storytellers). Indeed, in few of the interviews with backpackers, and in all the interviews with marginalized men, earlier interactions with informants were mentioned. As one backpacker exclaimed at the start of the interview (referring to a friend by the name of Dalit, who referred her to me): 'Dalit said you're interested in experiences from the trip, but I want to talk first about how I felt *here after* I returned home.'

In this vein, too, respondent-driven sampling shapes the interview interaction. The interview is not a sterile or virgin encounter; rather, earlier dialogues permeate it, *even before* the researcher has met the interviewees. If they are attended to sensitively, these dialogues can enrich the interaction, and can offer leads into the covert dynamics of the social system. In the quote above, for instance, the interviewee indicates not only what she thinks is of importance, or how her perceptions differ from those of her backpacker friend and perhaps from the interviewer's. Her short opening comment is a framing comment which proves invaluable for the interpretation of the interaction. Through such indications the interviewees position themselves and indicate that the interview is an important site of self-enclosure and self-presentation—a site that has become a subject of discussion in and of itself.

In groups and communities that have been repeatedly researched, the researcher occasionally encounters echoes of earlier researchers and interactions (Handelman, 1993; Metcalf, 2002). Although in these occasions there are several consecutive researchers (and not necessarily several interactions), they do illustrate how on a given interaction, echoes and dialogues with prior researchers bear significant effects. These occasions have their humorous relief (Figure 2).

The three informants shown in Figure 2 owe their hurry to the *a priori* expectations they have of the researchers and of their expectations (ethnographers seeking 'primitive people').

Conclusions

> If the place I want to reach could only be climbed up to by a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place to which I really have to go is one that I must actually be at already. (Wittgenstein, 1998, p. 10e)

At the onset of this article I suggested that sampling is by and large overlooked by critical winds blowing through the halls of the social sciences. In this respect I aspired to draw snowball sampling into discussions of contemporary critical epistemologies and methodologies, suggesting that snowball and other sampling methods have much

Anthropologists! Anthropologists!

Figure 2   'Anthropologists! Anthropologists!': Reciprocal Pre-expectations.

to offer, much of which has not been recognized up until recently (Heckathorn & Jeffri, 2001).

   Snowball sampling is viewed as far more than simply an instrumental procedure, and its merits and consequences were discussed in and of themselves. The discussion is productive because snowball sampling is effective in the research of *organic social networks*, as evinced in the two populations that I sampled and interviewed: backpackers and marginalized male drivers. In the former case, the social network is of particular vitality because it is what enables a (social) structure for people who are continually on the move (Sørensen, 2003). In the latter case, social network is less a matter of a means of accessing esteemed forms of cultural capital (i.e., consumption via travel). Instead, its vitality lies in helping members access work-related opportunities and workplaces (occupying the production side of the market), where primarily material capital can be secured.

   In both cases, however, knowledge is at the same time both researched and produced through snowball sampling, and it is of a dynamic nature. It is precisely sampling designs—the last strongholds of empiricist-positivist social science—that are presently viewed as dynamic embodiments of social knowledge and not as static 'vehicles' or 'methods' through which it is gained. With regard to snowball sampling stemma or flowcharts, more accent should be put on the 'flow' and less on the static 'chart.'

The idea that knowledge is of a dynamic nature is not easily digested, however, if only because dynamicity relates to evanescence and the ephemeral, which are notions that are incongruent with commonplace views of the scientific project. While the modern view of science entails a *lasting* contribution to mankind, a more dynamic appreciation engenders an alternative view based on such notions as interactions, moments, networks, partial perspectives, fluidity and embodiments.

In this article I also attended to methodological divisions and conceptual dichotomies in research processes, which take the shape of enduring distinctions between seemingly exclusive research phases. In this respect, snowball sampling was discussed illustratively, exhibiting how two different facets, sampling and interviewing in this case, are in effect inextricably interrelated. Through attending to the ties between two research facets, which were viewed as co-related 'participation frameworks,' the article shows how participants exert a significant amount of influence on the overall research, how research plays onto and into exiting social dynamics, and consequently, how additional knowledge, or 'nuggets of wisdom,' can be gained (Pawson, 2006). This line of exploration seeks to reduce or mitigate divides between research facets, and help acknowledge the organic interrelationships that exist within a given research.

Both sampling (accessing) and interviewing backpacker tourists and marginalized male drivers, evince, albeit differently, how passé structural notions of research are, and how ideologically laden are the socially constructed categories of 'field,' 'informant' and 'finding.' These categories are deconstructed in an attempt to re-appreciate aims and means in qualitative research agenda. A clue as to where this would lead concerns acknowledging the role social scientists have in larger social and cultural contexts, embodied in the motivation for and consequences of the actuality of the researcher–researched interaction(s). This is linked to the practices of academic research, which brings me to Wittgenstein's epigraph (above).

I view Wittgenstein's remark as an instructive lighthouse, illuminating blind spots and veiled moments in our research practices. These seemingly trivial moments hide under dichotomous structures which have natural seeming, and which require particular attention in order to be mitigated or deconstructed. In the article I proposed a holistic or integrativist view of social science research, and promoted the notion that qualitative research as a whole is a social site of knowledge generation. Yet the researcher—somewhat akin to Freud's notion of the unconscious modern person—knows at any particular moment only very little of the whole of this knowledge. This is the case even if—and indeed, sometimes precisely because—she or he partakes in the production of this knowledge. Hence the article points out how knowledge of a rather unique type can be gained from what we already posses: from the data we have already collected and within which we are immersed. Contrary to the nature of positivist science, whose research tenet is to explore ever-growing domains with a craving that is unremitting, this article shares Wittgenstein's suspicion of the 'ladder.' It refuses the colonial decree, and instead suggests that we critically—and patiently—observe the place '[we] must actually be at already.'

Acknowledgments

Notes

[1]   For the purpose of this article, the terms *informants*, *interviewees*, *subjects* and *referees* are used synonymously.
[2]   Note the writing (and reading) about conducting interviews is also an activity that researchers do, which is to say it is also a practice of 'doing a researcher.' Hence the hermeneutics of the interview interaction permeate the systems of academic scholarship.

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