Power Games between the Researcher and the Participant in the Social Inquiry

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Abstract

This article will deal with the different power relationships that are in play during the interview process in ethnographic research. It explores how interviewees are agents in the creation of their own positions during the interview process and how they shift positions in interaction with the researcher and with the questions posed to them.

Keywords

Reflexivity, Ethnography, Power Relations in Interviews, Social Class, and Women Migration

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This article will deal with the different power relationships that are in play during the interview process in ethnographic research. It explores how interviewees are agents in the creation of their own positions during the interview process and how they shift positions in interaction with the researcher and with the questions posed to them. Key words: Reflexivity, Ethnography, Power Relations in Interviews, Social class, and Women Migration

Introduction

To examine the power relations in the interview process gives the researcher the opportunity to see how respondents choose to represent themselves in accordance with the theme of the interview and the interviewer. This insight offers the researcher a chance to see how they represented me and the reasons underpinning their decisions to represent themselves and me in particular ways. The purpose of this article is to look at the different positions in which the researcher and the interviewee locate themselves at the beginning of the interview and how in the interaction of the interview, the researcher and respondent redefine their own positions. As Creswell states: "The researcher enters the informants' world and through ongoing interaction, seeks the informants' perspectives and meanings" (Creswell, 1994, p. 161).

I argue that a key concept is representation, how I presented myself and how respondents presented themselves. This term points to the cultural construction of experience, in particular, the processes by which agents construct images and through these images create meaning. These processes involved me as an interactive part in the interview.

I question some writers like Kvale (1996, p. 126) who have generalised on the powerful position of the researcher versus the participant. In this article different forms of power - economic in the form of wealth and social in the form of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984) were differently played to challenge or sabotage the interview.

Firstly the theme of the interview will be described, secondly this article explains the epistemological framework including the ethnographic perspective used conducting fieldwork and, lastly, it explores the negotiation of power relationships between the participant and the researcher in the process of the interviews. It should be observed that the impersonal style of the written text of this article would change in the last section called "Power relations in the interviews" to the personal 'I'. This will make explicit the feminist epistemological principle of the researcher being located in the research she conducts. Thus, the researcher becomes part of the production of contextualised knowledge, a knowledge, which is rooted in a specific viewpoint of the knowledge-producer (Stanley, 1997, p. 204; Kvale, 1996, p. 14). Patton (2002) and Kemp and Squire (1997) expand on this:

> Writing in the first person, active voice communicates the inquirer's self-aware role in the inquiry. The passive voice does not… "the domain of experiential self-knowledge" (Patton, 2002, p.1). Voice reveals and communicates this domain. [H]ere we owe much

to feminist theory for highlighting and deepening our understanding of the intricate and implicate relationships between language, voice and consciousness (Pattton, 2002, p. 65). In current feminist writing it is the privileging of women's subjective experience and the commitment to political change that recur as the distinctive and fundamental aspects of a potential self-reflexive, feminist epistemology. (Kemp & Squire, 1997, p. 145)

The theme of the interview focused on the effects of international migration in shaping the national and gender identities of Spanish women, who migrated to England (UK) between the1940s and the 1990s. Thus, the purpose of the interview was to investigate how Spanish immigrant women *constructed* their national and gender identities according to certain historically available modes of representation; and whether women's socio-economic and educational backgrounds in Spain contributed to their self-understandings in England.

Epistemological Framework

The research[1] on which this study is based considered a feminist approach to the data analysis. It is suggested that a feminist perspective allowed the research to analyse women's constructions of their life histories as a process and a product of social interaction, power relations and personal agency. Both a concern for women's experiences and a concern for their socio-economic backgrounds helped the research to focus simultaneously on women's agency and the constraints of social structures in the shaping of cultural and gender identities through the process of migration.

Both perspectives are anchored in my position as a researcher with a specific background: a daughter of Spanish migrants, born in Brussels. My father emigrated to Germany for economic reasons and my mother emigrated with a friend to Belgium as an adventure. My father's status as a *guestarbeiter* came to an end after two years residence when he was told to leave Germany. He had to emigrate to Belgium. These experiences are contextually located. I was raised in Brussels and then in Madrid under the Franco dictatorship. I lived my adolescence during the young democracy in Spain, and came to London in my early twenties.

Feminist research on women's lives underlines a number of methodological questions to do with the unequal power relationship between the participants and the researcher. This also includes commitment to presenting the research to participants in a clear, informed manner, seeking their consent to take part, guaranteeing them privacy and confidentiality and making space for feedback at the end of the interview.

In addition to the 'raw experience', material conditions also had a key role in the shaping of respondents' identities. The next section will deal with the importance of looking at the data considering differences in respondents' economic capital. The division of the sample according to respondents' socio-economic backgrounds and education follows the epistemological principle of a materialist approach. The research looked at women's material conditions, how these affected their formal education in Spain, their decision to migrate, their marriage and how, in turn, these choices shaped and are shaping women's self-constructions of gender and cultural identities. This provided new resources for research categories within every social class in the cultural group in the sense that women's experiences differ in every social class and within it (Harding, 1987, p. 7).

One of the problems of qualitative studies concerns the absence of (sub) cultural aspects

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1 Bravo-Moreno, A. (1999). *Gender, migration and identity: Spanish migrant women in London* PhD thesis. London: UK. University of London. This work will be published as a book: Bravo-Moreno, A. (2004). *Migration, gender, and national identities*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang Academic Publishers.

in studying social groups like working, middle and upper class migrant women. Their (lack of) coherence is hardly ever problematised (Lather, 1991, p. 131). The research attempted to access diverse positions available to various groups that were likely to produce different knowledge within respondents' experiences (Kemp & Squire, 1997, p. 143) and explored the locations of different power relations in a way that this knowledge could be used by respondents to be aware of their conditions in their social context. Both perspectives - a concern for women's experiences and a materialist approach - enabled the research to see the interaction between social structures and women as creative strategists who devised ways of dealing with the limitations and contradictions they experienced (Middleton, 1992, p. 36).

Thus, the research used women's accounts and a materialist epistemological framework to analyse the fieldwork data. The next section will discuss the methods of data collection used and the two main criteria taken into account for the classification of participants in this research: participants' social class and the chronological period during which women emigrated to England. The purpose for the use of these criteria is also outlined.

Methods of Data Collection

This research was conducted using qualitative-ethnographic methods aimed at the reconstruction of everyday life in a specific migrant group by using the terms and understanding of the members of this group. Participant observation, field notes and interviews were the key methods used to give an in depth insight into the particular setting of Spanish immigrant women in London (Huberman, 1994, p. 8). The interviews were open-ended, applying a life course perspective given the varied backgrounds of women immigrants, their different motivations for international migration and the particular circumstances prevailing at the time of their arrival and subsequently. Open-ended interviews were used specifically for allowing for a range of possible responses, including the unexpected (Kvale, 1996, p. 7; McCracken, 1988, p. 16).

These methods were designed to elicit Spanish immigrant women's understandings of their gender and cultural identities in England. The life stories illuminated the decision to emigrate and described the real life context in which the process of migration occurred. Thus, the open-ended interview as a method, which allows a multiple set of outcomes (Yin, 1994, p. 92), served to explore the variety of participants' responses regarding their definitions of gender and cultural identity from their specific positions in England.

Furthermore, it is important to realise that women's constructions of gender and cultural identity were not easily observable phenomena. Thus, this research relied on detailed accounts of women's representations of themselves and others - English nationals -, which were by their very nature personal. Participants' representations are part of a much wider set of social processes, which must be analysed to understand why women migrated and to what extent migration has or has not changed their understandings of themselves (Brettell, 1982, p. 21; Eastmont, 1993, p. 35). The research aimed to understand the decision to migrate and its effects on women's identities and to grasp some of the tensions and contradictions in these processes and the way these processes were likely to change between generations. These women's life histories as migrants were culturally embedded and their descriptions were, at the same time, a construction of the events that occurred, together with an interpretation of them. Therefore, participants' accounts were cast against a larger social, cultural economic and political background in which migration occurred (Andezian & Castani, 1983; Boyd, 1986). Analysis of life histories revealed the subtler details of the experience of identities in the context of migration (Friedman-Kasaba, 1996; Gabaccia, 1994). Thus, qualitative methods were particularly appropriate to explore participants' experiences of migration and its effects on their gender and cultural identities.

For practical reasons, London was the base for my observations and interviews. London

is the city where most Spanish immigrants settled in the UK and where I live. The research was drawn from a range of different sources. These have been used to complement participants' accounts, field notes of the interviews and observation in the Spanish organisations in London. First, I conducted interviews with 35 Spanish immigrant women living in London and second I took notes from observations in Spanish organisations in London for 10 months. Third, I conducted interviews with significant members of Spanish organisations, who assisted Spanish migrant women in London. Fourth, I examined statistical data on migration in the UK and in Spain. The next section will present in a greater detail the different sources of information the research drew from, looking at their strengths and weaknesses.

Sample Framework

This research explored women' socio-economic background and their formal education. The purpose of this categorisation was to see how social class, work and education were interrelated in both social settings, Spain and England, and how that interrelation affected women's constructions of their gender and cultural identities in different historical periods. Many of the women were not working for pay. Others were working part-time or working full time outdoors and were also responsible for the house chores. Thus, taking into account social class and education shed light on questions such as: How respondents who had graduated from university view themselves when working as cleaners until they mastered English language? Does formal education transform a woman's shaping of her identity?

The occupational position of these women provided an important indicator of their socio-economic background. However it did not reveal the complexities of women's class as it is lived which may contain elements other than the purely occupational. The meaning, which the women who were interviewed attached to work for pay was also significant when talking about class. It was important for the concerns of the research to comprehend how women experience social class and the meanings they attached to work and education.

Furthermore, to look at the period participants emigrated to Britain aimed to examine two aspects; first, to see whether a dictatorship and later a democratic regime in Spain and the changing immigration policies in Britain affected women's decisions to emigrate, and second, to explore how political changes and their implications in both countries shaped participants' representations of themselves as women and as Spaniards in England.

Sample Selection

My access to the women who were interviewed was through snowballing from acquaintances and colleagues. I first went to the Spanish Consulate and talked about my research. I was told where I could find Spanish immigrants. Initially, I visited five different locations in London where Spanish migrants socialised. Seven women were recruited. I interviewed two women who were introduced to me by a friend. One of them told me after the interview, she only agreed to it because she knew me, otherwise she would not have agreed. Snowballing from participants themselves provided me with the rest of the sample.

Being Spanish assisted me in finding participants; I was told that an English woman had attempted interviewing women from a centre visited for her own study some time ago. Unfortunately, the women in the centre had ignored her. They saw she was English and, although she spoke good Spanish, people in the centre were reticent about being interviewed by an English person. Her presence was seen as an intrusion in the only Spanish space for the Spaniards of these organisations. Women did not want to be reminded they were in a foreign country, even though most women members of that organisation had been living in England for

more than twenty-five years. The English woman represented an aspect of invasion of their Spanish space. Women expressed this idea by being indifferent to or annoyed with the English woman whom they felt did not belong there.

Ang-Lygate has dealt with the accessibility to interviewees on the grounds of sharing ethnical identity (1996, p. 157). Patton (2002, p. 64) and Kvale talk about using the self as a tool in accessing interviewees:

> The interviewer has an empathic access to the world of the interviewee; the interviewee lived meanings may be immediately accessible in the situation, communicated not only by words, but the tone of voice, expressions and gestures in the natural flow of the conversation. The research interviewer uses him - or herself - as a research instrument, drawing upon implicit bodily and emotional mode of knowing that allows a privileged access to the subject's lived world. (Kvale, 1996, p. 125)

My experience of interviewing was very positive. I did not encounter any problem when I approached possible respondents. I explained what I was doing; they asked me what city I was from in Spain. I am from Madrid but I also said that my mother was from the north, Galicia, and my father from the south, Andalucía. I chose to mention my parents' origins to seek some sympathy from the women, as I knew there were a large number of Galicians in the centres. When I interviewed Galician women, some of them used Galician idioms that I understood. I identified cultural mannerisms and responded accordingly. I was aware of a whole body of cultural features and cues in this subtle fabric of non-verbal literacy, which were crucial in my interaction with this group of women. In this sense, cultural literacy was as powerful as literacy in the language. My position in the group became even easier and more identifiable.

Some women approached me saying they wanted to be interviewed. It was clear that my position as a Spaniard, and perhaps as a woman, gave me an immediate right of access to the group. I was seen as 'belonging'. The sharing of one common nationality and language as a code of interaction allowed me to be accepted at face value. However, in some cases, in the middle and upper class groups those attributes were not a passport for identification. This will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Some of the interviews turned out to be a kind of therapeutic session, due to the sensitive nature of the experiences described. Such interviews seemed to follow a cycle. Respondents would start answering my questions generously and expand on the themes most distressing for them. When they talked at length of their painful experiences and cried, they seemed to release their pain in the interview process. Scenes of crying and distress occurred with some frequency. In the cases where I saw that a respondent was totally engaged in her story, the interview took the shape of the participant's narrative with just some prompts on my part to expand on themes relevant for this research. Special distress was shown when respondents talked about experiences of depression associated with lack of English language skills, which reflected feelings of social isolation. Experiences at the British borders were also distressing.

I was moved by these stories. Holland and Ramazanoglu talked about the effects of the research on the interviewers (1994, p. 136) and Steinglass speaks about how group discussions that had been explicitly designed to be non-therapeutic were viewed differently by the participants (1995, p. 125). Many interviews happened to be very distressing and emotionally draining during the first months of fieldwork. After the interviews, I had to unwind and share my distress with a friend. I was positioned as an understanding ear as the interview developed. It would have been helpful to have some training or rely on a specialist for some guidance. Moreover, for many of my interviewees it was the first time they had disclosed their story to

somebody else.

The recreation of respondents' experiences of loss of family and social networks in Spain, the sensation of discontinuity of cultural identity and the acknowledgement that some had suffered a depression came to light in the interviews. The reflection on their own experiences allowed them or forced them to make causal connections regarding why they reacted to particular experiences the way they did.

Some of the strategies were to explore the reasons that led them to depression and how they coped with it using an array of strategies. Some of those strategies were working harder - up to 15 hours a day - for pay; travelling more frequently to Spain; trying to contact other Spanish women in London; or going to psychotherapy. These respondents tried to make sense of the why's and the how's of their lives in the interview to bring coherence to painful events in their lives. Those events that respondents saw from a 'present' time in the interview became intelligible. Steinglass refers to the similarity between research and therapy, in his case on the subject of family, because "it points to the particular power that may be inherent in being able to take an 'observational stance' on one's life and behaviour" (1995, p. 126).

The longest interview took five hours. The length of the interview depended on each woman's experiences and the engagement in her story. Some women chose to split the interview in two: this was the case on five occasions. I would visit the participant twice, and each meeting took usually two hours. One participant chose to divide the time of our interview into three meetings. Interviews were conducted in Spanish, the language the interviewees chose. I also kept a research diary and field notes of my interviews and observations made in different Spanish institutions where I was introduced to Spanish migrant women.

All the interviews were tape recorded except for one in which the woman did not want her voice to be recorded because she was afraid of her work status. She was working 'illegally' (she was not paying taxes). I told participants they could stop the tape-recorder at any time or not reply to any question they were not comfortable with. All the participants answered all the questions. Some women asked me to clarify the questions posed or to engage in other themes, which were not related to my question. I thought it was important to let women 'deviate' to other topics. On many occasions, this free flow of conversation would give rise to a rich source of data to complement my questions. I tried to make women feel at ease with me. For that purpose, I explained the aim of the research, a bit of my background and I answered personal questions addressed to me. I think this exchange of information made most women feel relaxed.

Power Relations in the Interviews

I will be looking first at how I presented myself to the women in the sample. Second, the attention will shift to how respondents viewed me. Third, this section will turn to the position of the researcher in the interview. Fourth, there will be an analysis on the interview as a reflective process. Lastly, the section will deal with the term 'emigrant' which some respondents deemed problematic.

How I Presented Myself to the Women in the Sample

I used different strategies when I presented myself to different members of the migrant group, depending on their social class and educational background. I did not start with these devices from the beginning of my fieldwork, but I thought they were necessary after I had conducted some interviews in order to overcome unequal power relationships between upper class participants and I. Some middle and upper class respondents, in particular, placed me in a

disadvantageous position using to the disadvantage of the interview, my young age and/or lack of social status. From their point of view, the basic attributes that characterised me were my being Spanish and a woman.

To working class women I presented myself as a daughter of migrants and as a migrant myself. This was directed towards their memories and emotions from their past as young migrants in London. To upper class women I presented myself as a professional worker to make up for 'my lack' of economic status, and/or upper class family background. Depending on the formal education of the middle class women, I introduced myself as a mixture of representations; that is as a migrant and as a professional worker. This was directed towards their own experiences of migration and of being students and professional workers in London.

How Participants Viewed Me: Trying to Establish Different Forms of Power in the Interview

I provoked different attitudes and responses according to how the women viewed me. In the case of upper class and some middle class women their construction of me was shaped by their concepts of social class power (in the case of upper class respondents); and/or intellectual power (in the case of some middle class women). Other feature attributed to me was my 'youth', which some respondents constructed as negative. While others saw this as a positive factor for I was seen as having a career ahead of me. Another form of constructing me as powerful was my lack of family ties (husband, children). Participants asked me whether I was married or had children and since my answer was negative to both, they saw me as a woman free of constraints. The next subsections describe the dynamics of representations of power during the process of the interview.

'I' Viewed as a Young Student Provoked Disdain

Most of my interviewees mentioned my youth. My youth represented for some middle and upper class women a lack of professional status. I was considered sometimes as a high school student. Their perception of me diminished the importance they attributed to this research. I felt I had to 'prove' I was old enough to be conducting a research study and to work as a lecturer. Some times I felt - especially with some upper class women - I had to impose my academic 'achievements' and my professional life to be considered a good candidate for spending time with me. This initial barrier was removed in most cases after the first ten minutes of interview, when they were engaged in their own story telling instead of testing me. I wrote in my field notes how an upper class participant, Flor, interacted with me:

> She told me I gave the impression of being a very young student, full of illusions. She asked me when was I going to enter the labour market. I had already told her that I had been working as a lecturer for six years and I was doing my doctorate. I understood by her face that she was not sure what a PhD was or what one could do with it. When I explained it to her, she said: 'Well you must be very clever you have a career ahead of you'. She said this as a positive observation. Then, she asked whether I minded her gluing photographs in the family albums during our interview as she did not have much time and she had a pile of albums she wanted to fill in. During the interview she answered my questions while she was choosing, classifying and gluing the photographs in the albums. The tone of her answers and the fact that she chose the time of this interview to glue the photos on the album - I had booked an appointment with her three weeks in advance - was significant. I read this action as a portrayal of subversion and

> hostility against the interview and what I represented for her. Her answers were bitter: 'Everything I did in my life was having 5 kids and keep a family. Now, I am unemployed. I have so much time in my hands I don't know what to do with it. I don't have a career. I do not have qualifications. My only purpose in life has been to have a family. All that I am is a grandmother, a mother, and a daughter'.

Her definition of herself was in relation to others. Her tone was sad and resentful. I was, perhaps, the representation of what she would have wanted to be, I was seen as young, successful in my studies and profession and having no family ties. Another participant also showed this attitude. These respondents opposed what I represented for them. Perhaps, it was too painful to realise that their self-definitions were circumscribed within their family ties and not to their own persona. However, they reckoned their aspirations had been to have a family. The way that they saw me shaped their attitudes towards me and the tone of their answers, which were sharp, reserved, and concise. Flor's attitude towards the interview and me contrasted with her attitude towards a domestic worker at her house whom she saw as her subordinate. In that case her approach was charitable.

The negative emotions of this respondent obstructed the fluidity of the interview. In fact, the interview turned out to be a catalyst for her own feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction, and emptiness. In this sense, the interview was cathartic: it gave this respondent the chance to express her anger. Interviews may turn into an instrument that respondents use to their own advantage: to reflect about their past and also to show a 'free' reaction (however rude or appreciative it may be) towards the interviewer (McCracken, 1988, p. 28). Flor welcomed the catalyst effect that allowed her to express her resentment.

The next sub-section complements this one in looking at the emotions the interview process triggered and their effects on the content of the interview.

'I' Viewed as a '*Señorita*' Provoked Rejection

Andrea, a participant, confirmed a position of rejection towards what, for her, the interviewer represented. What follows is an extract from our interview and some of my field notes on what she said and how she said it.

> I call your generation [referring to me] the generation of the Coke and the '*señoritas*' and the '*señoritos*' [young women and men in a pejorative sense]. Now, we have come to a career woman in Spain. The 'señorita' says: I study, I chose to work in this or that, I have the right to get grants, and so forth. We, the ones who grew up with Francoism and poverty, who didn't grow up with the European Common Market, we see a big change in your attitude regarding everything.

Andrea said this in an angry tone. She was only forty years old, which meant that she was 18 years old when Spain became a democratic country. She enjoyed a grant to finish her degree in philology and came to London to practise her English. Then she married a British lawyer and became a housewife. I wrote in my field notes:

> Andrea was including me in her definition of '*señoritas*'. In her eyes, I was the representative of the generation she was referring to. Specially, since she asked me how I was financing my studies and I had told her I had been awarded a grant. At this point, I felt part of her subject; I felt I was the catalyst of her frustrations. However, she had talked earlier in the interview of a very conscious decision she took regarding who was

going to be the breadwinner and the housewife in her home. She praised herself for taking that decision. She was aware that she was doing what it was expected of her: being a housewife. She constructed herself as the one in control of her decision; she put aside her career interests in favour of her marriage and family, as she said. She defended this position as a convenient decision at the time that she took it. Yet, at this point in the narrative Andrea seemed to have gone to the other extreme of the story, blaming historical circumstances for becoming a product of her time and not been able to be a 'señorita' with a grant. Indeed, it seemed to be what she would have really wanted.

Andrea actively constructed her story around a historical causality chain. She was not able to continue her career because she was not born in the times of the European Common Market. However, earlier in the interview she had claimed she and her husband had decided to take different roles within the marriage. Contradiction and reconstruction were at the heart of her life history. I shaped Andrea's answers as a researcher who produced animosity. She saw me as a negative challenge to her 'conscious' decision to become a housewife.

The form and language Andrea chose, how she organised her past and present time, how she described herself in relation to the past and failed to take into account that she had received a grant to complete her university degree, formed part of her interrelation with me. The thematic and the linguistic connections in her story, portraying me as a 'señorita', which she used in the connotation of being a wealthy woman, brought into view the interpersonal context of the interview, the connection between Andrea and me as the researcher. When Andrea talked about her life, she revealed her 'truth' that did not account for what actually happened. That is, her conscious decision to stay at home looking after her children while her husband worked. Perhaps this decision stemmed from financial necessity or personal insecurity towards the labour market in London and her poor English, instead of a 'free' personal choice. However, Andrea gave me instead a construction of her experiences, which was not 'logical' when I compared different extracts of her story. Later parts of the interview did not verify her statement: "I freely chose to become a housewife and don't regret it. I am happy with the decision I took". Therefore, I could only make sense out of her life history by paying careful attention to the contexts that shaped the creation of her story and to the worldviews that informed it. How the respondent organised the past, present and future time in the interview, the way that she described herself and her intentions in relation to the past and the way she described, failed to describe or contradicted her life decisions. Inserting myself into how the respondent saw and experienced the world gave me access to her cultural categories, i.e.: '*señorita*' and other assumptions according to which she appropriated cultural meanings that construed her world.

However, my interpretation of her story was also 'situated' in my own socio-cultural, economic, educational and historical frameworks that played a part in the interpretation of Andrea's experiences. Thus, my interpretation is also vulnerable to the scrutiny of other researchers whose positions may not originate in the same map of locations. In the next section I will deal with positive representations of the interview and the researcher as part of respondents' search for help.

'I' as a Social Worker, Psychologist, and Interpreter Provoked Sympathy

Some working class participants mistook me for a social worker and a psychologist. Viewing me as a social worker or a psychologist, on the one hand, facilitated the disclosure of painful and important information that otherwise the women may have kept secret. It made me more aware of the importance of handling this information very carefully and confidentially, as their trust in me was vital in revealing their experiences. On the other hand, perhaps due to the

profile of both professions - social worker and psychologist - some women expected me to 'help' them. This meant visiting them regularly with the hope of resolving their needs for company, as some women felt lonely, or translating English letters sent to them by official organisations.

One of the respondents, Carlota, asked me to give counselling to a young woman who had made a failed attempt of suicide and was in hospital. I told her I was not equipped with the necessary training for such case. However, Carlota said I must have studied psychology as a part of my degree and I should know how to deal with this case. Carlota called me 6 months after I finished my fieldwork. She wanted me to write the names, addresses, and telephones of all the women affiliated to one of the Spanish organisations and then order them alphabetically. She said she thought of me because I probably had a lot of spare time and this would help them. Her view of me as a helper and having a considerable amount of free time to spare, confirmed some respondents' construction of me as a student, who only studied for the exams and had long holiday periods.

I became an interpreter and a translator for one participant. I accompanied her to different doctors and interpreted for her. This woman was suffering from schizophrenia, which I was not aware of before the interview took place. In fact, nobody in her close circle of acquaintances knew. When she told me her story, I thought she needed medical help. She was aware of this and asked me to go with her to the GP (General Practitioner) because she did not speak any English and was embarrassed to tell her story to an interpreter. She told me I was the first person to whom she had told her 'story'. I did accompany her to the GP and other specialists. I felt I could not ignore this woman's asking for my help just because my relationship with her was one of researcher-interviewee. I could not separate my principles as a human being from my research. I did not use this interview as a part of my study as I thought it would be unfair to the person who had disclosed her story and was suffering a mental illness.

'I' as a Researcher Had to 'Prove' my Research Was Important

Some middle class women, depending on their formal education, saw me as a student or as a researcher. In one of the cases one participant was in a powerful position in a university. I went to her office to interview her. Her approach was decisive and clear cut as I wrote in my field notes. I described the struggle to try to 'convince' her of the importance of the interview.

> When I went to see her we had made an appointment for two hours in between meetings to do the interview. However, when I arrived at her office, she told me it was not possible. I told her that if she did no mind we could continue the interview another day. She said she would have more time later on in the afternoon. I explained the purpose of my research and she asked me what the conclusion of my research would be. I told her I did not know since I had not analysed my data yet. She said that I could have an idea of what the conclusion was going to be. I told her that it was an early stage for me, and that I did not go in the field to confirm preconceived ideas of what the conclusion would be and then do the fieldwork to match what I expected to find. She seemed satisfied with the answer and we started the interview. At the beginning, she was answering the questions categorically as if words were stones thrown in the air to fall on the ground and build a perfect construction. Her intonation and posture provoked in me the same response, although in a more subtle way. I thought, I also could make her feel that I knew what I wanted and that what I was doing was important, so important that it deserved part of her busy time. As the interview developed she became more relaxed and laughed and made jokes. We continued in a very relaxed atmosphere, she was reachable, quite different from the beginning. A student knocked on the door she told him that her secretary was

> not there and that she was in a meeting with me. When that student left I told her that there were only 3 more questions, just in case she wished to see that student later on. She replied 'only 3 more? I thought that it was going to take longer. I am enjoying the interview!' She said this in a very pleasing tone. When we finished she gave me her card. She told me she was going to write her private telephone on the card, 'I don't give this to everybody, you can reach me here at any time, just in case you need anything you can contact me easily'. She showed me the building, took me around to the staff room and the library. She was really hospitable, friendly and human.

In this encounter, identity was negotiated within a dense web of power relationships: professional position, generation, and life and academic experience. Initially, Susana viewed me as a student not yet a professional within the academic hierarchy in which she positioned herself. In her eyes, her cultural, experiential, and social capital[2] were higher than mine. Our identities represented the interplay of our own backgrounds, which predisposed us to 'see' the other in a certain light. I was caught up in this negotiation. Yet despite these constraints we could choose, negotiate and construct ourselves situationally. Once we had both demonstrated our resources, and after her assessment of the interview during the first ten minutes, our positions became more fluid and other 'shared' representations such as being Spanish, women, and sharing a common interest in the subject entered the game of negotiations. This helped balance the unequal positions.

The 'Personal I' in the Interview

Although, I had read in some of the literature on interviews that the interviewer should not talk to the interviewee about her own experiences related to the subject of the interview or give any personal information, I discovered that telling some of my interviewees I was a daughter of emigrants and had come to London on my own, at what they considered a young age, opened a complicity and commonality between us that, otherwise, would not have existed. I observed this complicity as soon as I mentioned my background. Their empathy was expressed in openness to tell me about their stories of depression or/and stories of feeling a foreigner in England and in Spain, with the assumption I understood what they meant. Here is a description of the changes of attitude I found in two participants when I spoke about myself:

> I saw her much more at ease than the first time we met. I think the reasons were that it was our second meeting and most important, I told her a bit of my background, which she identified with immediately. I told her about my family background, their migration to Belgium and return to Spain in the seventies. She also asked me about my experiences when I arrived in London on my own. She identified with what I had told her and she referred to it later on in the interview.

In another case, with Asun, I noted:

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2 Cultural capital encompasses a broad array of linguistic competence, manners, orientations, which Bourdieu terms "subtle modalities in the relationship to culture and language" (Bourdieu 1977, p. 82). Social capital consists of resources based on conventions and group membership (Bourdieu 1987, p. 3-4). Economic capital refers to economic wealth: 'material forms of capital' (Bourdieu 1977, p. 183).

> At the beginning of our interview up to when we had a break I felt her tense and suspicious. She was answering my questions concisely. She avoided eye contact. When she proposed to have a tea and I went with her to the kitchen she asked me about myself, whether I was planning to stay in England, whether I had a boyfriend. I was talkative and answered her questions sincerely. When we returned to the living room and I switched on the tape recorder I saw her alleviated. She did not control so rigorously her answers and started making some jokes.

I think it is important to establish as much as possible an equal relationship with the interviewee. Part of that equality is to listen, to make one accessible and approachable. This is particularly the case when dealing with life stories. When the participant agrees to tell her story, she agrees to expose herself to a stranger, the researcher. My response could not be detached but receptive, flexible, appreciative and responsive when the interviewee found it necessary to ask personal questions. Both parties relied on respect of the other. Vulnerability played an important role in the interview. I think the participant must feel that the researcher is willing, if the case arises, to give some information about her as part of equalising the power in the relationship.

The Interview as a Process of Reflection

For some women my questions meant they had to reflect on their life experiences, which they had not done before the interview. Some women who had lived in London for five or for twenty years had not thought of the issues that arose from the interview such as the differences or similarities between Spaniards and English nationals. The interview involved returning to experience; attending to feelings; and evaluating experience. These processes involved re-examining events in the light of each woman's aims and knowledge. The interview also entailed integrating this new knowledge into their conceptual framework. When women had not reflected on some of their experiences my questions forced them to name their thoughts, their emotions. In some instances women commented towards the end of the interview on questions I had posed to them at the beginning. They said they had not thought of those issues before and they still had the question in their heads; they were revising their views, trying to answer me. Experience entailed thought. It included reflection. The interview was the trigger instrument for that chain. Participants interpreted what was going on attending to both thought and emotion. They became not only experiencers but also experimenters: creators in the telling of their experiences.

Most women enjoyed being interviewed for this research. The interview gave them a chance to talk about themselves. They liked the fact that their experiences were important, and there was somebody to listen to what they had to say. Some of the underlying reasons for older women may be that they had a lot of free time and liked the thought of having an appointment during the week and looked forward to it. One of the participants prepared a table with different cakes she had baked for our meeting. The meeting was taking longer than I thought and we made another appointment for the following week to finish with the interview. In our second encounter she had cooked lunch for us both. I wrote the following in my field notes about Paca:

> She told me that her husband had warned her regarding our interview 'Be careful with what you say, don't make mistakes'. Her daughters felt embarrassed to bring their friends home because if their friends asked Paca why she came to London or about her family history she would tell them about her father who was a colonel who met the Spanish King Alfonso the thirteenth and fought in the Spanish Civil War. Paca's daughters would

tell her 'Don't say that'. They would look at Paca with reprimand eyes because they thought their friends would think their mother was lying or showing off. The friends of Paca's daughters thought that all Spaniards who came to England worked exclusively in domestic service. Now, Paca does not talk any more about these things. She avoids the subject altogether. She felt happy that she could talk with me freely and told her family 'Now, I will talk with her [me] whatever I want and none of you will be here to correct me'. Our two interviews took place when her husband was at work and her daughters were not in the house. Paca told me: 'I don't feel restrained to talk to you about what happened because I am telling the truth. I don't show off. I have pictures to prove it'. She showed me pictures of her family and a signed picture of the King Alfonso the thirteenth addressed to her father.

What emerges is Paca's fear and limitation to express herself in public. The repressive attitudes of her husband and daughters assumed a clear map of social representations that the audience formed when listening to Paca: an eccentric Spanish woman, a domestic worker or somebody who needed to be corrected. From that point of view these representations highlighted Paca's lack of ability or intelligence or worth. There was a consistent distortion of Paca, who not merely enjoyed telling her memories when socialising, but did nothing to restrain herself from doing so.

Paca felt relieved at the opportunity she had to talk in Spanish at length with somebody who was interested in what she had to say. Paca wanted to expand on themes about which she felt proud without being corrected and censored. In fact, she welcomed the interview as a chance to present what she saw as part of her self, her identity: to belong to a family whose members had been in the highest military positions, who met the King Alfonso the thirteenth and fought in the Spanish Civil War.

The Term 'Emigrant' Viewed as Problematic by Some Respondents

Some women were almost 'offended', when I told them I was interested in studying Spanish immigrant women in London. Some women stated firmly they were not immigrants because they had married a British man, or they did not come to the UK to work. Sometimes, I would ask a woman what the term migrant meant for her and the answer was somebody who went to another country to work due to economic necessity in the country of origin. The word emigrant, for some women, was loaded with representations of poverty and menial jobs. Although, I defined international migrants as persons who leave their country to go abroad and spend a minimum of one year in the host country to work, they would still consider the concept of migrant as not corresponding with their self-representations. These women came, usually, from a wealthy background and were married to wealthy British men. Therefore, I ended up saying I was doing a research on Spanish women who had lived in London for some time.

One of the women wanted to clarify that she was not an emigrant. I had previously told her that I was studying Spanish immigrant women in London. She defined migrants as people who leave their country to work in a different one. She said she did not come to London to work, she got married to a British man and her nationality was British, therefore she did not considered herself a migrant. I could read her views of not being an emigrant because she was from Gibraltar, which is British; therefore when she moved to Britain she was still within the British nationality. I did not want to pursue the subject right then since I felt her somehow defensive of her Britishness and eager not to be classified under the category of 'emigrant' which she identified with being a low paid worker who came to Britain to work.

In another case, I told one of my colleagues I was doing a research on Spanish immigrant women in London. She said her landlady was Spanish. When this colleague told this person I

was interested in interviewing her, she said she was not Spanish, but from the French Pyrenees married to an English man. However, my colleague knew she was Spanish, and she attended a Spanish pensioners' centre, where one requirement of entry is to hold a Spanish passport. She refused to be interviewed on the grounds that she was born in the Pyrenees (part of the Pyrenees are in Spain) and on the grounds that she was not an emigrant.

When I told another woman about my research, she said she was not sure about the term 'emigrant' since she was married to a British man. Was she an emigrant? I explained to her that her husband's nationality was irrelevant for this research and that any person who left the country of origin to work abroad for a minimum of one year was defined as an emigrant. She seemed satisfied with this and agreed to be interviewed. Different respondents' conceptualisations of the term 'emigrant' affected their response to the interview. As seen above, in one case the interview did not take place because this woman did not see herself as an 'emigrant' and, therefore, refused to be interviewed. The understanding of women's interpretations of the term 'emigrant' became paramount if the interview was to take place. Thus, my approach to the theme of the interview developed in accordance with women's reactions to the terminology used. The naming of a looser theme produced better results. Therefore, to say to the respondents that the interview was about Spanish women who came to the UK between 1940-1992 and had lived in the UK for more than a year was taken with no reservations. In fact, none of the working class or upper middle class women was concerned about the term 'emigrant', unlike some middle class respondents with a low level of formal education.

Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to outline some epistemological standpoints of the methodology used and to describe the methods of collection and analysis of the fieldwork data. The open-ended interview was chosen as a method of data collection because it allows for an understanding of how agents interpreted events in their lives. Respondents' approaches gave prominence to human agency and personal associations of meanings. Thus, a qualitative approach was well suited to the research. It is precisely the subjectivity of open-ended interviews - their rootedness in time, place, language and personal experience - what the research rested on. Respondents' stories revealed insights about socio-cultural settings and historical circumstances in Spain and the UK that spoke 'by itself' through women's accounts. In this way, women's recollections of their lives made it possible to investigate the interrelations amongst cultural meanings and women's social class, educational attainments, gender relationships and the effects these had on the construction of their identities. It was possible to examine gender inequalities, cultural negotiations and other practices of power from the onset of the relationship between the respondent and the interviewer. Unequal power practices, in some cases, were taken for granted by the respondents, that is, respondents spoke in terms that seemed 'natural'. However, the analyses of their accounts and how they represented the researcher revealed how culturally and historically contingent their accounts were. Thus, respondents' life histories were not merely a way of telling their stories but a way to construct themselves, a means by which identities were fabricated. The analysis of these women's construction of their cultural and gender identities started by examining how they represented themselves during the interview and how they represented the interviewer. Both representations were a first step in the interpretation and construction of particular identifications.

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