

Research on the move: revealing power dynamics in the field

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The article follows my research journeys in Tamil Nadu, India between 2012 and 2016 and presents the power dynamics I encountered while working with a nomadic community, the Narrikurovars, also pejoratively referred to as “Gypsies”. This article starts by introducing the Narikuravar community, explaining its nomadic patterns and reflects on the importance of telling the stories of people whose lives are often buried in silence. Then, the article further exposes the dynamics of power that structured my research by describing the interactions that took place through translators/ interpreters (Fujii, 2013). Here, I describe what it means not to speak the language of the community I worked with, the process of working through translators, and I analyze how these processes revealed who gets to speak in a community and who does not have a voice. The article concludes by analyzing the epistemic implications of co-generation of data (Yanow, 2006) when working with marginal and vulnerable communities. It argues that researchers should both reflect upon their position of power and adopt positions that mirror the power dynamics of the communities they are researching by placing themselves in powerless situations. Even if this power reversal is temporary, it will help researchers understand what it means for their participants to make claims of justice, and could further articulate, reveal and minimize power networks.

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