

Some Challenges of Collaborative Research with Local Knowledge

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Collaboration¹ is an increasingly significant issue in anthropology. This paper outlines what it involves and the possible implications. Although I am perhaps not the person to hold forth about it, as I have recently experienced a large collaborative failure. After putting in months' of work on a research proposal and securing a million dollar grant from the Qatar National Research Foundation, I was unable to get meaningful collaboration going with Arab colleagues. I learned some hard lessons. The project was part of a programme at Qatar University to establish research and teaching in sustainable development. The Shell multinational energy company was ironically the sponsor. The project title was "Human-environment-policy interactions in biodiversity conservation contexts and their socio-cultural and environmental implications, focusing on the Al Reem Biosphere Reserve in western Qatar" (Sillitoe 2011). It set out to investigate the repercussions of the dramatic changes occurring since the mid Twentieth century with the exploitation of large oil and gas reserves. What are the biodiversity conservation implications of rapid urban and industrial development in the Gulf that threatens the fragile desert and marine environment? Cultural ways that for centuries have enabled people to survive sustainably without degrading it are disappearing. Previously, Bedouin had intimate environmental knowledge, managing locally available pasture and water wells, while today they rely on imported fodder, desalination plants and employ migrant stock herdsman. Today they are more familiar with motor vehicles than camel caravans.

Anthropology and collaboration to-date

The collaborative turn is arguably the next phase in anthropology's history. We can think of the discipline's development comprising three stages – the native as: subject, informant and collaborator.

- In the first "subject" phase there was no firsthand interaction. The few nineteenth-century scholars who took an interest in the ways of people elsewhere – a radical step when the majority of their peers dismissed them as uncivilized savages – conducted

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their enquiries indirectly from the comfort of their libraries. These "armchair-observers" relied on reports and correspondence with colonials, missionaries and travellers, together with published and archival records.

- In the second "informant" phase, anthropologists went to the field and stayed in communities, for months or years, and, so far as possible, joined in peoples' lives to further our understanding of humanity. It marked the birth of the "participant-observation" tradition that dominated twentieth century anthropological fieldwork. It grew steadily throughout this period, leaving the discipline with an extensive ethnographic legacy.
- In the third "collaborator" phase, the natives are increasingly engaging in research, with "participant-collaboration". They are understandably demanding a say in enquiries conducted in their communities, seeing outsider anthropologists as collaborators in jointly defining and tackling problems. These "participant-collaborators" look set to play a prominent role in the twenty-first century, with the emergence of a truly pluralistic discipline.

These are long-term epoch-defining "phases", unlike short-term fashion-driven "theories" (or ideologies, as I prefer) that are more often of academic interest. It is not that subsequent phases replace previous ones. They build on one another; we still work in libraries and archives, and continue to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, though increasingly with indigenous colleagues' collaboration. The changes they mark were perhaps inevitable, following European colonial expansion around the world. The demand for involvement is an aspect of decolonization for previously subject peoples' who seek control over representations of their lifeways (Cervone 2015).

The collaborative move comes from two directions: firstly, research relationships have been changing with people worldwide able to read and criticize representations of themselves, and increasingly resisting being subjects/ informants of inquiry. Vocal "indigenous scholars" have emerged, who are understandably demanding a say in research conducted in their communities, arguing that it should be on their terms (Battiste 2002; Four Arrows 2008). There is a deep-seated and understandable resentment with enquiries that largely exclude communities, while being about them (Tuwihai Smith 1999). The move is similar to other subaltern demands, such as working class and suffragette movements, to have more of a say in affairs that concern them. While some local persons have always played a central part in ethnographic research – often called key informants – their contributions to anthropological knowledge are largely unseen and managed by outsiders. Reflexive critiques signal discomfort about the often invisible relationships anthropologists have with "informants", whose anonymity is further criticized as cover for bogus objectivity. These argue that acknowledgement of those who afford access to their communities' institutions and contribute significantly to anthropological understanding should be more central to ethnographic practice and extend beyond grateful acknowledgment in preface and footnotes. Collaborative approaches seek not only to make this contribution overt, but also facilitate co-conceived and co-written work (Lassiter 2005). These differ from previous participant-observation

methods and the postmodern reflexive focus on the anthropologist's achievements and experiences.

Secondly, the advent of participatory research in recent decades, notably in international development, has stimulated collaboration. This is partly a response by agencies to pressure from communities demanding more involvement in development programmes, often through NGOs representing them. It is also a response to calls for better targeting of development activities with the squandering of vast sums. The bottom-up involvement of intended beneficiaries in setting goals and strategy will more likely result in successful programmes than top-down imposition of – largely capitalist modernisation – plans. Participation slowly became an accepted way of doing things, with local people varyingly involved in development activities, until today it is commonplace; at least in word if not always deed (Sillitoe 2013). Collaborative research, grounded in the perspectives and interests of communities, parallels participatory approaches, in reaffirming their rights to co-direct work that represents and may inform decisions that affect them. It seeks to work "with" rather than "on" people, who contribute from project design through data gathering and analysis to presentation of results. It promotes distinctive participatory methodologies with indigenous academics, which demand a genuinely transparent process; such as the Kaupapa Māori approach of New Zealand that demands indigenous and foreign scholars engage on equal terms (Bishop 2005; Calabrò 2015). It also, self-interestedly, offers a way for us to respond to demands that research has impact beyond the academy, in seeking to meet communities' requirements.

Anthropology is embracing more collaborative approaches – sometimes called "engaged anthropology" and "tandem research" (Lamphere 2003; Schlehe Hidayah 2014; Theodossopoulos 2015). For instance, the indigenous knowledge in development initiative that seeks to include the expertise of local communities meaningfully and equitably in the development process (Sillitoe, Dixon, Barr 2005; Sillitoe 2015). While it focuses largely on how people secure their livelihoods and treat sickness, it seeks to encompass socio-cultural context, including political dynamics that often feature unequal power relations that perpetuate poverty. And there are those museum ethnographers who seek to collaborate with curator colleagues and local communities in regions from whence collections originate, in arranging displays and documenting objects (Herle, Bani 1998; Hendry 2005:28-55). Ethnographic museums have consequently moved from anthropological backwater to the mainstream, introducing fresh ideas and leading the way in collaborative research.

Advancing effective collaborative research methods is a challenge. Participatory researchers have pioneered many innovative techniques that demand refinement. Such as focus group discussions, problem censuses and workshop simulations; analysis depending on data: ranking and scoring, pattern charts and matrices, and even statistical analyses. New technology offers exciting opportunities to take methods forwards, such as participatory video (White 2003; Cullen 2011), which may allow indigenous collaborators to convey their views more effectively (although handing the camera over is not new, participatory filmmaking is currently marginal in anthropology and in development contexts is associated with empowerment and advocacy). But promoting participation can be a challenge, as illustrated in the Qatari research when we arranged to conduct a survey in the Al Reem region (Sillitoe, Al Shawi 2014:225 ff.). We sought a representative sample, including a gender balance. In view of the strict social protocols

that hedge around interaction between women and men, only females can interview one another. When we arranged for female colleagues and students to administer the questionnaire, we had a convoy of vehicles with each chaperoned by a male relative, which caused a stir when it arrived in a settlement and inhibited proceedings.

The episode was not unusual, for all is not plain sailing with participatory-cum-collaborative approaches. Often applied in mechanistic ways they yield dubious results. Too little critical review has gone into their development, of the problems likely with their use, and they lack intellectual weight. Understanding diverse cultural situations assumes an in-depth appreciation of local ideas not achievable in the rapid approaches that characterize much participatory research. While this may strike anthropologists as obvious, it is not inevitably so to others. It relates to the relatively few anthropologists involved in devising and using these approaches to-date. Instead, inexperienced persons have come forward, and applied participatory methodologies in unsophisticated ways, threatening to devalue them. The methods call for further development. It is an opportunity for anthropology with such approaches lacking a disciplinary home that can vouch for practitioners' qualifications, and so raise and maintain standards.

The collaborative agenda is increasingly acknowledged as overdue. We need to forge connections and promote a meaningful exchange of ideas, expertise and criticism between colleagues from different cultural-intellectual backgrounds, comparing and contrasting the advantages and disadvantages of various approaches to furthering understanding of human ways of being in the world. It has the potential radically to alter research and teaching practices, and indeed what we think we know (Sillitoe 2012). While recognised for some years, as illustrated in the ongoing evolution of the ethical codes of various professional associations (e.g. Association of Social Anthropologists 2001), the discipline is perhaps slow in furthering them. Why?

Power plays

One problem is collaborators calling themselves "indigenous". Some object because it is difficult to define indigenous, arguing that it is meaningless with much migration, and potentially divisive and politically dangerous (Sillitoe 2015:349-52). It is questionable whether the term "indigenous" is appropriate to describe Qatari arrangements; it is not a locally used concept. Nevertheless, there is certainly a widely acknowledged Gulf Arab culture and knowledge tradition. Furthermore, the often accompanying interest in tradition (Ntarangwei 2010: 88-90), which some talk about keeping intact against current globalizing pressures – certainly a concern of some Qatari colleagues with their country's rapid change – is criticised because all cultures change and an interest in tradition – thought of as unchanging custom – is erroneous. The criticisms focus on Western intellectual preoccupations and are unhelpful, even arguably ethnocentric, with populations elsewhere readily using these labels. They surely have a right to identify themselves as indigenous with certain traditions (categories that overlap considerably with anthropology's society and cultures), if they think it will help in their struggle for their rights and self-determination. After all, even the UN, arbiter on global issues, sanctions use of the terms.

The criticisms are anti-collaborative. Arguments against the use of these terms may be well intentioned, seeking to reduce xenophobic attitudes but they come perilously close to domineering neo-colonialism. In apparently seeking to efface locally defined cultural distinctions, critics invite the imposition of outside views, denying differences between populations. If we are unable to distinguish between communities in the manner these terms suggest, the implication is that the same standpoint logically applies everywhere, which few critics probably intend. While we are all the same, as human beings – the rub is: whose socio-culturally informed worldview is going to dominate? It is understandable that people suspect that criticism seeks to smother their way of being in the world (Tuwihai Smith 1999; Four Arrows 2008). We need to get back to the ethnography to further understanding of why and how people use such terms, and listen non-judgmentally to indigenous collaborating colleagues.

The participatory approach has not proved as successful as initially anticipated in incorporating local perspectives (Cooke, Kothari 2001; Mosse 2003). It is vulnerable to manipulation, both from without and within communities. The power relations have attracted interest, particularly how some outsiders twist the approach to serve their own ends, using the word "participation" nominally to give projects credibility. Such manipulation occurs as researchers seek to meet "milestone targets" demanded by accounting fixated bureaucrats, which pervert participatory research (managing investigations to ensure results fit preconceived aims and ideas). It gives credence to the post-development critique about the dominance of Euro-American assumptions, imposing views that may be contrary to local understandings and ways of being. It relates again to local attempts to overcome the legacy of domination and stereotyping by outsiders (Pierano 2010). The power differentials and inequalities of the global political-economy are the issue, allowing "experts" from wealthy regions to represent communities elsewhere. While the critique has some force, it presupposes momentous political change globally to redress the balance. Moreover depicting communities as powerless victims of neo-colonial "Western research" denies them agency, when they have found ways to contribute, albeit recognition is not necessarily forthcoming.

There is no neo-colonial angst in the Gulf region where fossil fuel revenues ensure resources to direct research (Sillitoe 2014a). The challenge for outsider collaborators is engaging with – what for them is – a largely closed, Byzantine political system. It is a confusing combination of egalitarian arrangements, featuring descent-ordered tribes that extend across national borders with sheik clan spokesmen nominated by informal consensus, and hierarchical states, featuring Emir rulers and their wealthy extended families that dominate the central government, though they consult tribes via their representatives in making and implementing decisions. The only effective way I could engage with the government bureaucracy was through Qatari colleagues who had tribal connections within departments that they could call on. But even connections do not ensure action. The political arrangements seem to render persons reluctant to make decisions without extensive consultation, preferring to refer any issue on, usually to someone higher in management. Consequently, decisions can take an inordinate time, which contributed to the collapse of our collaborative project. We needed the approval of the Ministry of Environment's "General Directorate of Natural Reserves" to conduct research in the Reem Biosphere, a process that dragged on for many months, effectively stalling the project because without permission we could not start field work.

Internal political agendas are an issue (Cadena 2006: 214-218). While participatory research has highlighted the diversity and complexity of local communities, and routinely seeks to accommodate it (according to gender, age, social status, ethnicity, occupation, etc.) – by advancing various strategies to "widen participation" and further "empowerment" – it would be naive to think we can eliminate political manoeuvring (note that the disaggregation of communities matches the move away from normative structure to agent process in the social sciences). Also there are dangers of exacerbating inequalities and conflicts in encouraging expression of different views. Communities may experience less outsider domination, only to find themselves subject to more insider domination. Collaborating colleagues may, or may not, meaningfully foster participation. They can encounter considerable personal dilemmas; facing conflicting interests as "insiders" cooperating with "outsiders". How representative are they of their communities; who selects and monitors them? They are equally prone to impose their views, which may align with only part of the community, probably the more powerful, keen to neutralise any threat to their privileged status. This is certainly so in the Gulf region where those in power muzzle other voices, such as those of the migrant worker population that experiences difficult conditions.

It probably contributed to the failure of our project. The funding body, the Qatar National Research Foundation (which sanctions collaborative research, requiring collaboration with Qatari institutions to qualify for grants), operates independent of government, after funding bodies elsewhere such as the European Research Council. Consequently, the ministry concerned with our research only knew about it when we approached for permissions. It likely sounded alarm bells, threatening to expose sensitive matters; for instance, although Al Reem has UNESCO biosphere status (Sillitoe, Al Shawi 2014: 221-25), the authorities had scarcely implemented any required environment and conservation management measures, and faced international criticism and threats of withdrawal of listing. Furthermore, it is likely that some of those associated with the Reem region expressed reservations about our plans, concerns that reached the ears of the authorities via clan links; for instance, when we were measuring the necks of camels (for the fitting of radio collars to track their foraging movements) a vehicle pulled up and a passenger lowered a dark tinted window and demanded to know what we were doing, telling us that he was a general whose relatives owned camels there. There was no explicit mention of such matters, reflecting a common cultural tendency to avoid open discussion of contentious issues and possible embarrassment or shame.

How to respond to collaboration used for political ends? Some colleagues see no problem, participation implying political engagement (e.g. Linstroth 2015). They advocate "action research" (see Reason and Bradbury 2008) to address unequal political-economic relations and promote social justice (as they see it). It is tricky. It is ethically dubious for outsiders to assume to represent others' interests and to take part in political activism elsewhere, as opposed to seeking to further all parties' understanding of issues. For instance, there are aspects of Gulf social and political arrangements that may strike Westerners as human rights infringements. Such as government by an unelected and fabulously wealthy emirate monarchy, which appears undemocratic, even totalitarian. Or gender relations that feature seclusion, veiling and cousin marriages, which some think grossly unfair. But such cultural arrangements are readily misunderstood and interference can have tragic consequences as currently seen following the "Arab Spring" with

chaotic violence and terrorism. Anthropological involvement may help, by sensitizing researchers to cross-cultural context. Albeit close association with a community may prompt us to keep our distance, able to surmise (probably thanks to extended fieldwork featuring participant-observation) how certain parties seek to use us. This is not to advocate ignoring the plight of the marginalized and poor. Collaborative research may inform action that the local community thinks in its interests, which surely complies with anthropology's emerging impact aims, and may help narrow the gap between academic and applied/ impactful anthropology. But we have fine lines to navigate here.

Knowledge challenges

Dominance is more pervasive and challenging than political wrangling and research manipulation. It extends to what counts as legitimate knowledge. Take our assumption of social order, namely that persons everywhere interact within communities according to agreed norms that guide behaviour. We face problems accessing actors' social realities. While aware of how these expectations inform their actions, actors are often unaware of the wider sociological implications. For instance, if asked why they subscribe to obligations to support particular categories of kin, such as agnates – as is common in the Arab world (“my brother's enemy is my enemy etc.”) – actors will likely say that it is customary to do so. Supporting agnatic kin is a value to which they subscribe without necessarily reflecting on the socio-political ramifications, unlike anthropologists who have advanced the heuristic contrivance of segmentary descent. It is the formulation of such constructions that underpins our claims to some intellectual authority and capacity to further understanding of human interaction.

The use of such constructions puts actors (unfamiliar with such sociological heuristics) at a disadvantage, effectively excluding them from academic discussion. It relates to intellectual control and power, anthropology serving, wittingly or unwittingly, as an agent of Western domination, as some indigenous scholars argue, by forcing understanding of their lifeways to fit foreign Western concepts, to serve our intellectual interests. It seems odd that a discipline that seeks to understand other cultural ways of being in the world should produce accounts that are inaccessible to actors. Indeed it appears to understand them better than they understand themselves, when their behaviour and ideas are the subject of study. We see the consequences, for instance, in the descent debate (Verdon 1982; Cole 2003), with questioning of the status of the descent model given the apparent absence of associated local ideas (partly prompted by debates in New Guinea where the model proved patently inapposite – Barnes 1962; Sillitoe 1979: 39-46).

It is arguable that literate Western analysis inevitably dominated where we encountered oral traditions, spoken words leaving no enduring record. It is not necessarily an embarrassment' although it is a conundrum. We have amassed a record of cultures, histories and languages that would otherwise be lost, irrevocably changed by colonial and capitalist globalizing forces. The need to address such loss is increasingly recognised; for instance, the contribution of cultural practices to biodiversity conservation with talk of maintaining biocultural diversity. Here is another paradox, with some indigenous peoples, regardless of their hostility towards anthropologists, drawing on these ethnographic records to construct identities around "traditional customs" and to defend their rights. But Western disciplines have also dominated where people have literate traditions. Although

some refer to this literature, it fails to make the mainstream. For instance, how many know of the Arab scholar Ibn Khaldun, an early sociologist (Gellner 1975; Al-Azmeh 2003: 70–74)? In his account of how desert nomads with strong *asabiyyah* "group feeling" conquered less-cohesive city dwellers, subsequently being conquered themselves after becoming socially enfeebled following some generations of sedentary *dawlah* "state" life, he formulated a concept of social solidarity centuries before it appeared in European social philosophy and he advanced a rural-urban (Bedouin ↔ Sultanate) cycle of social change that prefigures today's theories of rural-urban relations.

We need to challenge the widespread assumption that Western knowledge is superior. It is socially and historically situated, and we have no grounds for declaring it better; it is a subjective judgement informed by culturally shaped values. Consequently, I prefer to talk about ideology not theory, the latter subject to rapid fashion changes that uncannily track Western ideological fashions – our "isms" such as structuralism, Marxism, feminism, postmodernism etc (Sillitoe, Bicker 2004). It undermines the dominance of Western social science and its views having the stamp of some unquestionable universal intellectual authority. On what grounds has Western academic discourse assumed authority for its concepts and understanding (Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 59-65)? Its philosophical traditions are not demonstrably superior, unlike its technological capabilities that afford unparalleled capacity to intervene in the world, on which its culture's domination largely depends. The techno superiority informs the ambition of Gulf States to develop research programmes to match those of Euro-American institutions, while seeking to remain true to Arab worldviews. The populace see *tanmia* "development" narrowly as technological advancement, with rapid building of high-rises and highways (Sillitoe 2014a). It possibly contributed to the collapse of our project, conservation seen as an irrelevance or possibly hindrance to material advancement.

But we are increasingly aware that we seem to lack the wisdom (and certainly the political structures) to manage this techno-behemoth, with worries over damage to the environment, such as climate change, and destabilisation of the world order, with devastating wars. There is indisputably more to life than the material, as growing interest in the social and emotional aspects of well-being show, and many other cultural traditions teach. It is arguably time to heed such alternative views of how to be in the world. There are aspects of indigenous Gulf culture that could help here (Sillitoe 2014a, b). Acknowledging the wisdom of Arab ways is not, of course, the same as returning to a Bedouin lifestyle, which is what many erroneously think. The cosmology and values that informed that lifestyle, particularly in respect of Islamic beliefs and practices, remains strong. While they have experienced staggering rates of economic change and embraced consumer culture, with ubiquitous large shopping malls, Gulf citizens are uneasy, particularly about the implications for their Islamic beliefs and family values.

Differing local perspectives

The perspectives of local collaborators may differ strikingly from ours. What we present, for instance, as a series of agnatic descent groups going back to a distant ancestor, to account for social order, may be an entirely foreign abstraction. The actors may have no such genealogical model in mind; it is sufficient in an agnatic framed kin system to

see behaviour in collateral terms, where classificatory "brothers" support one another if in trouble, which will result in actions that mirror the descent paradigm. Unless, that is, "brothers" are at odds with one another or, caught up in wider kin networks, find that other closer kin (such as wife's relatives) are on the other side and opt to support them. We are only now facing up to the implications of consequent individual behavioural variation with the move from a structural to a processual focus, challenging assumptions about homogenous normative codes guiding social interaction or persons sharing the same concepts and values.

Differing, culturally relative perspectives may partly account for Qatari colleagues' lack of collaborative enthusiasm, not seeing what research into biodiversity conservation has to do with sustainable development (Sillitoe 2014b). While a visitor, seeing the barren moonscape of Qatar, might wonder if there is much biodiversity to conserve, many Qatari colleagues would demur, although doing so implicitly in the context of comments on worrying environmental damage with rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. The different perspectives suggest that the ideas of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development as understood in Western environmental discourse may be subject to culturally relative interpretation, which discussions over possibilities for collaboration further confirm, colleagues unclear how they might contribute to such research. There was some dissonance in associating *tanmia* "development" – largely seen as technological progress – with *mustadama* "sustainability" – which has connotations of "forever" – that became clearer in discussing *weqaia* "conservation" – which has connotations of "save". While it is possible to think of saving something perpetually – such as the *dhub* "spiny-tailed lizard" – it is difficult to conceive of doing so in development contexts, which imply progressive change – such as constructing new highways. Never ending technological progress increasingly exploiting resources certainly conflicts with "sustainable development" which, in advocating ecological steady state resource use, is the antithesis of "development forever".

The conservation and sustainability movement originating in the Western world could promote other reservations. While the scientifically informed global debate may assume that the consequences of environmental degradation will equally affect all humans, different culturally informed interpretations may lead to resistance. There are suspicions that conservation and sustainability are the latest ploys to keep Euro-American nations on top economically and politically, inhibiting development elsewhere by curtailing energy supplies, particularly with hypocritical capitalist attitudes that overlook finite limits to economic growth. Calls to reduce the use of CO₂ emitting fossil fuels, for instance, threaten the Gulf economy, heavily dependent on gas and oil exports. Consequently, the majority of Qataris prefer not to consider the implications of sustainable development, as it implies a reduction in current high living standards, although some increasingly worry about degradation of the environment (Sillitoe 2014 a, b).

In discussing their behaviour, actors may emphasize its ethical, even numinous dimensions, which involve being a socially upright person aware of their place in their community enmeshed in kin webs of contemporary moral obligations and reciprocal relations (Sefa Dei 2015). The focus is on achieving wisdom, an on-going spiritual process. In this worldview, knowledge is not about having the wherewithal to explain and do things in the world but about appreciating and relating to it responsibly, perhaps following mythically sanctioned ways of being. Clash with such Islamic views possibly

contributed to our project failure. Where the phrase *Insha'Allah* "Allah willing" is regularly heard, research might seem blasphemous in suggesting interference in Allah's plans. The belief that whatever Allah wills, will be, fosters a fatalistic outlook that may further discourage any enquiries into protecting the environment because somewhat pointless. On the other hand, reflecting the contrary nature of human behaviour, there are passages in the Quran that admonish environmental stewardship. For instance, «Eat and drink from the provision of Allah, and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption» (Quran 2:60). And the declaration of *hima* "protected areas" that prohibit grazing of pasture or logging of forest for certain periods related to this obligation to care for the land.

Views of knowledge may differ further, as evident in attitudes to rights over it (Sillitoe 2015: 352-54). The Western approach stresses ownership with patents and so on to protect its exploitation, often for material gain. Other approaches treat knowledge as common property, shared collectively to benefit all. These differences prompt some indigenous representatives to advocate a clean break, seeing continued domination, given the Western approach to controlling and exploiting knowledge (e.g. with bio-prospecting and piracy). It is another aspect of self-determination, breaking with outside power structures that have undermined their epistemologies.

It is possible that the parties to collaborative research may differ further over aims and outcomes. Universities, for instance, expect staff to publish in high-quality peer-reviewed outlets to satisfy funding agencies and research assessments, which local colleagues may consider inappropriate, even exploitative, conflicting with their views of community needs and proper use of knowledge. Indigenous colleagues who do seek to publish their work in mainstream outlets may have difficulties because judged intellectually inadequate. They can provoke strong metropolitan criticism for threatening quality and rigour; worries that relate to loss of disciplinary control over standards. It might be foolhardy to coordinate with indigenous colleagues, given, for instance, the career implications and pressures to conform to disciplinary expectations, exacerbated by audit-driven research demands (Low, Merry 2010: S213; Mahmood 2012). Collaboration might inhibit contributing to today's ideological-theoretical debate, even though the questioning of Western intellectual pre-occupations is arguably good anthropology, with culture-bearers – the ethnography – leading enquiries. Some collaborating colleagues may respond by establishing alternative outlets, with electronic publishing increasingly affording opportunities, albeit they may face considerable resource and recognition difficulties. But such a go-it-alone response defeats the objective of collaboration.

The response of Qatari colleagues to this dilemma is, in my experience, to treat foreign academics as migrant labourers hired to conduct research on their behalf, including them as co-authors on publications to further their promotion prospects. They are quite open about it, just as they are on the increases in their salaries coming from collaboration on research projects. These are significant inducements to collaborate, and show how having the power dynamics in favour of collaborating colleagues does not necessarily result in meaningful research collaboration.

Overcoming western bias?

The introduction of foreign concepts to make sense of what we observe and experience is unavoidable. How else might we know arrangements elsewhere, already socialized as we are into an understanding of the world and with the particular knowledge gained during our education? The extent that we can control for subjective outsider distortion has caused much mind-wringing with postmodernism, which argues that our ideological (or theoretical) concerns inevitably distort our understanding of other ways of being in the world (Flaherty *et al.* 2002). It has, for instance, thoroughly criticized suggestions that participant-observation allows us to achieve a faithful appreciation of actors' understandings given the relativity of different cultural perspectives. It is difficult, after all, both to participate and observe at once, and in truth, our participation is pretty limited. When in the desert, for instance, I achieved some appreciation of Bedouin wayfaring skills but could never have managed on my own, in what was for me a hostile and featureless environment.

Collaboration with indigenous colleagues potentially offers a way beyond the dilemma that we inevitably misrepresent peoples' behaviour and ideas, unable to get beyond our culturally relative views. Engaging them in research as partners rather than informants, we incorporate persons who do presumably know their communities, as socialized members of them, although we may continue to face considerable challenges of translation. It is a racking-up of what we already do, for anthropological knowledge is not wholly a Western construct but the result of dynamic cross-cultural interchange, with many non-Western ideas somewhat informing our understanding of humanity. The move from participant-observation towards participatory-collaboration furthers the process, favouring a plurality of understandings of what comprises knowledge.

While the discipline esteems other ways of knowing the world, it has yet to follow through the implications of allowing other ideological traditions to contribute equally to understanding of them. It is difficult because it implies a dramatic change in existing academic arrangements, with a genuine democratizing of power relations. Current ones allow anthropologists to claim authority, and they are no different to others in being reluctant to relinquish power, even though the intellectual rewards may be large. But events are increasingly obliging change, particularly the mounting annoyance of some communities with outsider researchers, sometimes seen as envoys of unwelcome neo-colonial, capitalist forces (aka globalization).

Collaborative research assumes that some community members not only want to participate but can also do so without unduly disfiguring local perspectives. But they must have an understanding of what research comprises to collaborate on equal terms. Yet few other societies have any tradition of cross-cultural enquiry. Alternatively, some colleagues speak of decolonizing their knowledge, which is a puzzle if they wish to make their voices heard beyond their communities, as collaboration implies (Cervone 2015; Theodossopoulos 2015). They unavoidably distort local perspectives to some extent if they seek to engage with Western academic practices, which assume common structures of engagement and communication. Alternatively, imagine "us" collaborating in "their" research: that is, reverse anthropology, looking at the World through an entirely Arab or Amazonian ontological-cultural lens. Improbable? If so, meaningful participation unavoidably entails surrendering somewhat to foreign Euro-American academic ways (Cadena 2006; Ntarangwei 2010) – perpetuated, for instance, by meetings such as gave

rise to this paper, which take place in European educational contexts and follow its rules of engagement.

Indeed collaborating colleagues, exposed to Western intellectual debates, are arguably anthropologists by default, whatever their opinion of us, because they engage with two socio-cultural contexts and wrestle with the implications, which is a defining feature of anthropology, informing its cross-cultural perspective. In this event, what distinguishes indigenous from anthropological researchers? By definition, persons who identify as community members are indigenous. Yet, intriguingly, while it may offend colleagues elsewhere to call them anthropologists, some Euro-American natives who work in their own Western society, and are presumably indigenous researchers too, vigorously assert their anthropological identity (undertaking "anthropology at home" – Jackson 1987). It relates to the contrariness of the anthropology's culturally relative and comparative aims, as a global intercultural enterprise, different to, though encompassing, locally founded knowledge.

While indigenous colleagues seek to further understanding of their local communities, in their cultural terms so far as possible, and so enrich our understanding of a range of socio-cultural arrangements, few make any attempt to further understanding of all humankind (Cadena 2006:201-2). Anthropologists, on the other hand, while they also seek to further understanding of particular socio-cultural arrangements, endeavour to locate these within a comparative framework to advance our understanding of humanity from a cross-cultural perspective, in which context it is arguably legitimate to employ Western ideologies-cum-theories. Fieldwork not only supplies ethnographic data on different socio-cultural worlds for cross-cultural intellectual arguments but also heightens perception of comparative issues, otherwise we remain rooted in our own ethnocentric worldview, albeit we cannot entirely escape it, as postmodernism affirms.

While indigenous critiques of anthropology maybe helpful, they need beware of typecasting it as a Western neo-colonial imposition (Pierano 2010: 186-88), while making unacknowledged use of its theories and methods to contribute to its "discourse" (Nkwi 2006). If collaborating colleagues acquire the skills necessary to situate their work "trans-locally", as they become increasingly enmeshed globally, and so participate in anthropological discussions – which arguably are necessary if we are to collaborate on equal terms – this will alter their understandings, in addition possibly to changing the discipline's intellectual orientation (Stocking 1982:180-85). The enigma is that we become incorporated one in the other: an example of the local versus global contradictions caught in the "glocal" neologism. The incongruity is inherent in currently evolving practice, acknowledging the complex realities of co-research involving diverse parties, exploring the implications of the interrelationships between the plurality of knowledge systems contributing to anthropological understanding (Strang 2006). The challenge is to integrate our different understandings better, while realizing that complete integration would amount to assimilation.

Both insider and outsider researchers face the same problems, seen from opposite directions, which further suggest that collaboration should prove productive with the two perspectives complementing one another (Schlehe, Hidayah 2014). While indigenous academics seek to distance themselves from Western categories and methods of enquiry in representing their communities' worldviews, anthropologists struggle to engage with these worldviews using these categories and methods. We are all one-step removed

from the "real knowledge" that resides in local communities, inevitably dealing with representations, albeit collaborating colleagues have a more direct, authentic connection as culture-bearers. The extent to which colleagues' views differ from their communities relates again to political issues of representation, and are as crucial as differences with outsider researchers.

While new technology may further collaboration, it illustrates the dilemmas. Participatory video, for instance, may allow people to record their cultural ways and express what they know more effectively (White 2003; Cullen 2011). But, it may simultaneously usurp them, distorting their worldviews. Users implicitly adopt dominant communication conventions, which arguably alter their conceptions. Such critiques paradoxically imply discouraging communities from using such technology, when there are few communities unfamiliar with film nowadays. And its adoption need not necessarily stifle cultural ways, as evident with local productions often needing some interpretative commentary to make sense to outsiders without the cultural background to appreciate them. The intriguing challenges presented by the different perspectives epitomize the collaborative agenda, underlining the complexity of diverse cultural interpretations.

Educational challenges

Education is another issue germane to collaboration (Nichol 2011, 2015). Indigenous colleagues not only want to contribute to research on, and representations of, their communities but also, similar to foreign academics, engage in education and the oversight of the passing on of their traditions. Indigenous education programmes – from tradition schools to indigenous universities, variously supported by local NGOs and governments – seek control over the representation and reproduction of local worldviews in culturally apt ways (Shah 2015). To what extent is it possible, or indeed necessary, to reconcile differences between indigenous and metropolitan pedagogic approaches (Nkwi 2006:162-64)? The unfeasibility of a global approach to teaching that accords with multifarious knowledge traditions results in clashes with Western educational expectations of rational enquiry and the continual examination of learners – everything currently standardized according to tick-box checklists of "learning outcomes", "key skills" etc (Sefa Dei 2015). The risk is that indigenous institutions may decide that seeking recognition by metropolitan educational authorities requires too many concessions in representing and transmitting their knowledge. The implied isolationism further thwarts collaboration.

The Gulf response is not to confront dominant Euro-American expectations with Arab alternatives but to establish internationally competitive universities that comply with foreign occidental educational standards (for instance, arranging programme accreditation by outside bodies and advertising the resulting "branding"). The aim is to create the Middle East's "ivy leaguers"; for instance the Qatari state is investing vast sums in the university sector which is expanding rapidly. The system is not entirely alien with a long history of interaction between Arab and European civilisations and some overlap regarding knowledge traditions, notably in the sciences; ancient educational institutions, *jameah* "universities" appearing in the 8th century AD and influencing the foundation

and curricula of medieval European universities². The implications of adopting a Euro-American curriculum are gradually becoming evident. There is talk of affirming Arab scholarly traditions that remain true to Islamic cultural ways. For example, evolutionary theory's challenge to the Quranic version of human origins is uncomfortable for Muslim believers, implying sacrilegiously that there is no Allah "supreme being". Discussion is consequently discouraged, which conflicts with the Euro-American university principle of free speech and argument. It is through valuing and making visible the particularities of Islamic epistemologies and social structures that an acceptable education system may emerge but only so long as the university remains a place where new ideas are introduced, debated and negotiated within a culturally relevant framework, which is difficult where it is thought necessary to defer to foreign authorities to achieve international acceptance.

The emergence of indigenous institutions has implications for anthropology (Kuokkanen 2007). If we agree that their approaches are more authentic in teaching about their cultures, the inference is that they should inform our teaching about them (Ka'iili 2012). It implies novel approaches to anthropological education, which could possibly revolutionize the way, and what, we teach, with differing ideas about what constitutes, and how to convey, knowledge. Allowing space for a plurality of approaches and insights of indigenous education may also ward off intellectual stagnation threatened by our current audit culture, where standardization of learning inhibits the flexibility necessary for innovative teaching.

Management challenges

In view of the foregoing remarks, initiating and managing collaborative research predictably poses considerable challenges (Sillitoe, Dixon, Barr 2005: 27-84). Starting the participatory planning process defies conventional research arrangements, which require decisions about objectives before work commences, to address preconceived intellectual issues of current disciplinary interest. Few funding agencies will consider grant applications to spend time in a community developing a project with collaborating indigenous colleagues to address largely unknown issues. In contrast to rigid milestone-tracked projects that stymie participation, collaborative research, in sharing control, has to be flexible to respond to local views and cultural expectations, allowing for different approaches and sharing knowledge from diverse worldviews, within the context of agreed achievable objectives. Such research depends on building partnerships and sharing knowledge as much as achieving predefined goals. The structuring of Qatari research programmes by foreign consultants with milestones and so on, following the Western audit model, was part of our undoing. Local administrators learn to use these systems robotically, not understanding the implications for conducting research. And they can make decisions that can disrupt tracked progress and derail projects, as we experienced when Qatar University's Research Office unilaterally discontinued our project's PhD studentships, throwing our research arrangements into disarray, not even

²The Arab world has a long history of scholarship – influenced by ancient Greek and Roman philosophy in the west and Indian science and mathematics in the east – that advanced scientific knowledge during the European Dark Ages, and featured such thinkers as al-Kindi, al-Farabi and Ibn Sina to al-Ghazzali, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and Mulla Sadra.

making allowance for the hire of research assistants to fill the gaps. It demolished several milestone markers without making provision for alternatives, which led to problems with the funding agency when it came to completing mandatory three monthly progress reports.

Collaboration requires meaningful partnership building, helping colleagues master research methods sympathetic to their worldviews and involving them in analysis and interpretation. Colleagues may come from a range of backgrounds, not only local universities, but also NGOs and government agencies, comprising multi-disciplinary and variably experienced teams (Porter 2014). Collaborative arrangements can consequently be complex and require considerable management capacity. Teams need to be in regular communication, reviewing and sometimes revising aims and methods, responding to situational changes, new information and findings. It suggests extended training of future researchers, who will not only have to master doing research as postgraduates but also get the necessary management expertise by working apprentice-like as postdocs alongside senior staff on collaborative projects. Employment arrangements in Qatar, featuring migrant labour (Kamrava, Babar 2012) recruited on short term contracts— typically two or three years for many University personnel – militate against building up a cadre of experienced persons – a widespread Qatari problem – who can manage research projects. The consequent lack of continuity undermines the functioning of systems foreign to most Qataris, dependent on skilled persons from elsewhere for their establishment and operation. It is likely that Qatari colleagues' apparent indifference to collaboration and reluctance to take responsibility for aspects of our research was fear of making mistakes – not understanding the foreign management structures – and losing face, a significant consideration with sentiments of honour and shame strong in Arab culture.

Looking to the future

While collaboration between anthropologists and indigenous colleagues seems advantageous, indeed obligatory, it is currently limited. There are significant mutual misunderstandings. Many anthropologists overlook locals except as informants, many of whom in turn largely refuse to recognise foreign researchers.

We can anticipate some bridling to collaborative changes from the anthropological establishment, with their unsettling demands to relinquish some control and devise new ways to engage ethnographically, which threaten to unsaddle some theoretical hobbyhorses. A largely unspoken concern may be that allowing alternative cultural views more space could result in anthropology falling further apart, when it is already a difficult subject to define, as seen in trying to determine where it stands in relation to indigenous studies and to other disciplines such as sociology. The threat may be more illusory than real. The tendency to follow the current theory-cum-ideology keeps the wayward anthropological flock together somewhat. And anthropology's cross-cultural comparative concerns continue to give it identity. Collaboration extends more opportunity to those who supply cultural grist for its comparative mill to do so directly. Also, primary ethnography will be more clearly distinguished from secondary interpretations, with indigenous collaborators representing institutions and behaviours in their own cultural terms and not woolly all-purpose ones ready for comparative debate – such as clan,

lineage, band, gift, etc – and those who work comparatively will have to define their terms more closely.

The biggest mistake would be not to engage with these challenges, which are exciting, potentially offering considerable intellectual rewards for a subject that accepts axiomatically that we have much to learn from other cultural ways of being in the world. Furthermore, collaboration is becoming politically and ethically the only acceptable way to work in many regions. Collaboration also builds impact into anthropological research; for instance, working with politically active NGOs may ensure policy impact. But collaborative research is more demanding than previous ways of working, often requiring more time and resources than participant-observation, where we enter the field and follow our own intellectual agenda, which in turn was considerably more demanding than letter-writing armchair-ethnographic scholarship. And there is a greater chance of failure, as I have found out, in depending heavily on others to make a success of any research project, and who may have some fundamental issues with research as we practise it.

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