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Becoming cornered

Migration, masculinities and marginalisation in inner-city Johannesburg

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CHAPTER TWO

Emergent ethnography: fieldwork reflections, context and methods

Introduction

During the course of this study, I was often asked – be it at a conference, lecture or just an ordinary conversation with colleagues – ‘How did you as a migrant woman get to do research among men in such a dangerous setting?’ I always struggled to respond to this question because I did not have one standard answer to capture my experiences in the field, especially because not all the time did I wear the straightjacket of a ‘migrant woman’. Further, as I reflected on how I was doing or had done my research, I struggled to articulate my methodology, which, as someone trained in demography, I felt was at times unconventional, even ‘unethical’ or ‘unscientific’. Other than the methodology section from my dissertation research proposal, I did not have a clear methodology that I could share with those who asked. In fact, because I took an early detour in my research, shifting from being NGO focused to street corner ethnography, my methodology evolved as I was conducting the research. My anxiety about disclosing this ‘emergent methodology’ was amplified by my previous training as a demographer wherein methodology was highly standardised. I was haunted by the day in 2011 when, during a quarterly Research Update Meeting for the master’s students in Demography and Population Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, my supervisor asked me to go straight to the slide on methodology before introducing my topic and findings. On seeing my methods, he sharply commanded me to sit down and not waste people’s time because I had ‘nothing’ to present, owing to my ‘flawed’ methodology. I learned from this experience and carefully set forth my methodology in my dissertation research proposal but, as predicted by my PhD supervisor, I was forced to adapt my methodology to fit the unfolding context of my dynamic research site.

From finding the targeted sample and recruiting participants to seeking consent and collecting data, nothing was straightforward, and this shifting ground continued during data analysis and writing the dissertation. What started out as an impersonal, academic journey became entangled with my personal life when friends, relatives and acquaintances became involved. Going through field notes and recalling stories from the field took on an emotional aspect as well. Some of the challenges reported by informants were all too familiar, almost sounding like my own. Commenting on the open-endedness and the possible surprises that come with anthropology, Ferguson (1999, 17) quotes Marcel Mauss: ‘Ethnology is like fishing, all you need is a net and you are sure to catch something’. The ‘something’ can be anything: maybe the fish you set out to catch or another thing entirely, like a plastic bottle. Describing his ethnographic enquiry as ‘difficult and disorderly’, Ferguson (1999,19) alludes to the ethical and methodological difficulties he faced in his efforts to conduct an ethnographic study within an

urban setting of the Copperbelt in Zambia. For many economic, social and political reasons, it was difficult to fully immerse himself and he found himself doing ethnography in ‘unconventional’ ways.

Resonating with Ferguson’s experiences, in this chapter I attempt to answer the question I had dreaded throughout my study: How did I do my research as a migrant woman among men in such a ‘dangerous’ place? I explore key aspects of my methodology, including my positionality, data collection and ethics. Behar (1996, 29), in the *Vulnerable Observer*, quotes Harding on the relevance of the researcher herself:

‘The beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of research. This evidence too must be open to critical scrutiny no less than what is traditionally deemed as relevant evidence.’

Therefore, throughout this study, I foreground my different positions in the field to show how these have contributed to the claims and conclusions I make. Behar (1996, 8) posits that in anthropology ‘everything depends on the emotional and intellectual baggage the anthropologist takes on the voyage’. That baggage shapes our ways of seeing and knowing (Nyamnjoh 2012, 65). De Certeau (1984) makes a similar assertion that reading and understanding social space relies on one’s own position in it. Like several others, Nyamnjoh (2012) calls on anthropologists to do more justice to reflexivity and positionality, not only at the writing phase but from the very conceptualisation of the research. He defines reflexivity as ‘the ability to determine, surface and factor in the extent to which our dispositions, social backgrounds and social positions influence, in often veiled and subtle ways, the perspectives we hold on how different or similar to us those we study are’ (Nyamnjoh 2012, 66). Following such calls for reflexivity, I attempt to capture how I paid critical attention to my positionality in this study, highlighting how it shifted across multiple temporal and spatial zones in my efforts to understand the metaphorical elephant in the anthropological room (Behar 1996).

I detail how I entered the field in Johannesburg and the efforts I made to access the field, as well as my study design and data collection approaches, and how I conceptualised my study as a multi-sited ethnography. I begin with the disappointment I encountered following my attempt to work with an NGO and liken it, albeit not equate it, to the experiences and struggles of the participants in my study. While I identified with some of their struggles – I walked a similar road when I first arrived in South Africa from Zimbabwe in 2009 – I also use this chapter to show how differently positioned I was, most particularly because of the privilege that I attained over the years, ‘the privilege that allowed me to tell their story now’ (Behar 1996, 14). This privilege is partly related to the importance of

'papers' in the life of a migrant in Johannesburg, as I show later in this chapter and in greater depth in Chapter 4. Having the essential paperwork to permit me to work and live in Johannesburg was central to shaping my lived experiences and those of my participants in relation to belonging in the city, and in constituting the dualisms of outsider and insider, formality and informality.

Going into the field, study design and becoming cornered

At the commencement of my fieldwork in June 2017, I found myself in 'a place with limited options' or 'in a corner', to quote my study participants. In such places one has to think on one's feet, become creative, re-strategise and find new possibilities. The emic term for this used by my study participants, particularly my fellow Zimbabweans, is '*kukiya kiya*', a phrase also key in the research of Jones (2010, 286), who explains: 'It is all about a "zigzag" search for opportunity in the hardened face of reality'. This was how I felt when an NGO that I call Men and Boys (a pseudonym) informed me they could not let me study their organisation after all. I had met with them during preliminary fieldwork, two months earlier, when I had visited their offices. The two managers with whom I met at that time seemed excited that I planned to study 'the role of behavioural change interventions' in shaping masculinities, particularly in relation to reducing gender-based violence. Theirs was a well-known intervention that had been shown to reduce both gender-based violence and the risk of HIV. The prospect of having me as a self-sponsored researcher to add another, presumably positive, evaluation to their accumulating stack of evidence for development donors seemed to interest them. With excitement, I went back to University of Amsterdam to finalise my proposal with a plan to return for nine months of fieldwork embedded in the organisation.

With my work plan and timelines in place and my project approved by my supervisors, I headed back to Johannesburg. I left my family in Amsterdam, assuring them that I would quickly collect the required data and return to Amsterdam, write my dissertation and finish my studies. I did not anticipate that anything would go wrong because I knew exactly what I was looking for. As a demographer, I had learnt the art of formulating a precise methodology with clearly defined variables, target population and sample. I had clearly defined my research question: 'To what extent are ideas about gendered violence and positive masculinity understood in communities where Men and Boys has been implementing its behavioural change program in Johannesburg?' Having worked as a gender-based violence researcher within the NGO sector, I also had an idea of what I was looking for: I knew the various forms of gender-based violence and had helped formulate questionnaires about it. In my previous work, I had analysed

datasets and had a general understanding of the patterns, forms and prevalence of gender-based violence, at least in a few countries in Southern Africa. Yet as a novice anthropologist, I was trying to do away with my pre-conceived notions of violence and, on some level, I already sensed this might create frictions in the NGO world.

As someone who had lived in Johannesburg for eight years prior to moving to the Netherlands at the start of my PhD, I arrived and settled in quickly. I contacted Men and Boys, and they were still keen to have me on board. However, things did not go well in our first meeting when I shared my study protocol with the research manager and informed her that I was not going to administer questionnaires, but was going to conduct an anthropological study. I explained to her that my intention was to deviate from most of the studies to date in South Africa, which had approached gender-based violence with preconceived notions of what it was and how it played out. I was instead seeking to understand how masculinities were being constructed and practiced in everyday life and, in the process, to study whether violence was present in that context, and if so how it was understood. I thought that this approach was innovative and would avoid the trap of stereotyping women as victims of violence and men as powerful perpetrators. I told her that instead of solely focusing on violence against women by men, I was also open to examining violence by men against other men, and self-violence, should I encounter it. This approach was intended to provide a broader understanding of the violent practices of men as compared to a narrower view of men as inherently violent or of men's violence only affecting women. I reasoned that my research would help to answer the question 'What social and structural factors make men violent?' rather than the more commonly asked, 'What makes men violent towards women?' Given the high levels and multi-dimensionality of violence in South Africa, I thought this would be a novel approach.

I also promised to provide programmatic recommendations based on my findings, knowing that this would appeal to the NGO, but also because, at the time, I truly wanted my research to shape future interventions. In explaining my approach to data collection, I told the research manager that I intended to spend time observing my study participants as well as informally discussing with them the ways that violence shaped their everyday lives. This did not go down well with her; she was uncomfortable with the idea of me 'observing their organisation'. She said that she thought I was going to analyse the organisation's data from household surveys, and that I would interview attendees, at specific workshops, who the organisation would recommend to me.

I knew immediately that I could not do this as I had explicitly criticised this approach in my proposal. There, I had described how most of the studies on so-called positive masculinities had been conducted by the NGOs themselves, for example, Sonke Gender Justice Network, another NGO that works with men and

boys, had conducted such studies, and has invested heavily in producing evidence of their success. In many of these studies NGOs have relied on interviews that used a self-reporting approach, asking participants to respond to standard questions, for example in a questionnaire. In my estimation, this approach was prone to desirability bias. Having conducted similar research in the past while employed by an NGO, I knew people would often say what they thought the interviewers wanted to hear. Consider, for example, this statement that is part of the Gender Equitable Men (GEM) Scale,⁵ which intends to measure attitudes toward gender norms, and which I had employed in previous studies: 'There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten'. One could answer in the negative (that is, disagree with the statement) to appear like a 'good' man, or in the positive (in agreement) to present themselves as a 'tough' man in control of women. But neither response represents what a man might actually do in practice, or how the wider socio- economic context, history and culture might shape his actions. Because participants are sometimes materially compensated for the time they give to NGOs and researchers, they also often craft stories to please interviewers, hoping for more 'work' down the line. I thought an observational approach to data collection would yield new insights about what men say and do in their everyday lives, as well as the ways that wider contexts shape their actions and thoughts. To me, this seemed more scientific, although certainly less quantifiable, than a method that sought yes/no answers to complex and politically loaded questions, and left it to researchers to analyse the findings, following the common narrative that men were violent in South Africa because they were unable to adapt to life after apartheid.

Another critique that emerged from my previous work is that most NGO-based evaluations include only men who participate in the same NGOs interventions. My demographer's mind saw this as an obvious selection bias, which would limit the exploration of other factors that might have contributed to the positive masculinities the NGOs were so eager to document. Although training to be an anthropologist, my research proposal was very much informed by my training in demography and population studies, training that had made me highly sceptical of the sampling procedures and the quality of data I had been hired to collect when employed in the NGO sector. If my data were questionable, I wondered, then what might be the case for other data collected in this manner? From my perspective, the methods of ethnographic research had the potential to improve our knowledge about masculinities and violence, and I was excited about it.

Recognising how scientific research determine the allocation of resources (Janssens 2014) and the power of the data produced by NGOs' in-house research

⁵ The GEM scale was developed by Population Council/Horizons and Promundo.

See <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/measuring-gender-attitude-using-gender-equitable-men-scale-gems-in-various-socio-cultural-settings/>

in shaping public discourse (Lorist 2020), I also thought it was vital that they improve the quality of their data by attempting to reduce bias. I was naïve enough to tell them this. Hence, I proposed to also include men who had never had the benefit of participating in one of their programs, so as to understand other factors that may shape men's outlook on violence and (positive) masculinity. I also thought it was important to solicit the perspectives of the female partners of male participants to gain insights into men's behaviour and attitudes in the everyday intimate space of the home.

As the reader may have guessed by now, the research manager did not approve of my study design or my intended data collection methods. The consequent tension was exacerbated by the fact that I insisted on remaining an independent researcher. This meant that the organisation would not have control over my findings or how I might publish them. Although I promised to anonymise the names of the participants and the places they spent time, there were still concerns. After some back and forth to try to clear up what seemed to be a misunderstanding, the two managers from Men and Boys informed me that they could not permit me to conduct research on their organisation, meet with any of their employees or talk with certain participants. However, they assured me that I was welcome to attend their events and write about them, as long as I did not mention the NGO's name. I thought we had reached a fair agreement, and I was grateful that they allowed me to at least attend their events.

However, this new arrangement and the apparent resistance to my study by the very people I had hoped would be interested threw me off course. I had come prepared to conduct my research with Men and Boys. In terms of logistics, I was banking on the NGO helping me access the 'field' by introducing me to the communities in which they worked. Having attended two of their events in one neighbourhood near the central business district, I decided to go back to the same area and try and find community members who I could ask about the programs they had attended. I went to the venue where a Men and Boys workshop was being conducted and I asked the security guard about the workshop. Confused, he responded: 'Which one are you talking about? Here it's just a recreation centre [venue]; many events happen and many organisations come here so I don't know which one you are talking about'. I felt hopeless; I didn't know how to begin. This what Jaffe and De Koning (2015) describe as one of the challenges of urban anthropology: there is no clear definition or explicit demarcation of a 'community', as people are scattered throughout the city.

I had no idea which 'community' Men and Boys had recruited to participate in the 'community mobilisation' workshop. Opposite the recreation centre was a group of men. I thought of approaching them to ask if they knew about the workshop that had happened a few weeks prior, but I was concerned that this could be a risky move. Approaching a group of young men, as a young black

woman, seemed potentially dangerous, as there were many stories of women being attacked in this part of the city. Furthermore, approaching them in English would clearly mark me as a foreigner and would possibly increase the risk of assault. Defeated, I returned home, worrying over the prospect of failing in my PhD efforts because I could not recruit participants from the 'same community' targeted by interventions.

Finding new possibilities: *Kukiya kiya* methodology

Following my rejection by Men and Boys and my failure to find my way into 'the community', I began thinking the way many migrants do. Jones (2010, 286) describes *kukiya kiya* as 'an instinctive response to circumstances'. Who did I know who might help me find my way? The first person who came to mind was my cousin, Tino. He lived in the same neighbourhood where Men and Boys had conducted their events and where I hoped to do research. With few other options, I decided to ask him to help me to find research participants.

When I told him about my plan to conduct research in the inner city, he was shocked. Still unsettled from my experience with Men and Boys, I could not go into all the details about how I had fallen out with this NGO. In my proposal I had written that I would strive to include men from different class backgrounds who lived and worked in the inner city, because most studies focused on poor black men and I wanted to avoid reifying this category's association with violence. All I told him was that I wanted to do research on an NGO and the people they targeted. The NGO worked in the part of inner city that was known to Tino. I told him that I had attended two of the NGO's 'community mobilisation' events in the area and was now I trying to locate some 'community' members. After hearing me out, he assured me, saying: 'Come, we will sort something out, no worries'.

I did not doubt Tino's ability to help. Since I had arrived in Johannesburg he had helped me with many things, from sending goods to Zimbabwe, accompanying me in the central business district or to the airport, house sitting, and so on. Laughing, he continued: 'Whenever you come this side Gogo [grandmother],* tell me, so I walk with you. This place is very dangerous. It's no place for my sweet gogaz [slang, grandmother]'. Tino was always jovial, so much so that someone who did not know him might think he was high on drugs. With his help, I quickly located Uncle Kofi's Corner, which would become the main site for my research for the next nine months, from June 2017 to February 2018.

6 Tino calls me 'grandmother' based on the relationship that I have with his father, who is my cousin, but I am considered his mother's (my paternal aunt) younger sister. According to tradition, a mother's sister is like one's mother, hence Tino's father calls me 'mother', making Tino my grandson. Tino and I are three years apart in age.

Fear and familiarity in Johannesburg inner city: locating myself, selecting my research sites and recruiting participants

In what follows, I draw extensively on edited field notes to give an impression of how, with Tino's help, I found my way, literally and figuratively, to Uncle Kofi's Corner. Primarily drawing on observations and first impressions, the aim is to highlight how fear of the city and fear of failure, as well as familiarity with Tino and familiarity with being a migrant in the city for eight years, shaped my entry into the field.

June 2017: I asked Tino to come pick me up from Mopani Street, just three streets away from his mobile 'salon' situated on the corner of Capricorn and Pretoria Streets. Women would flock to his mobile hair salon to have their hair twisted, which was his only specialty. All he brought was a plastic chair for his client and a plastic bag with three different types of combs, which he kept in the back pocket of his baggy dropped down jeans. In the case of police raids (police search for migrants without papers), Tino told me that he would just pick up his chair and run away. Similarly, when there was at risk of a xenophobic attack, he was always ready to run.

After a few minutes, Tino arrived and we made our way through the hustle-bustle of the inner-city streets. Blaring sounds of cars hooting, rude taxi drivers cutting corners, others going through red traffic lights. Throngs of people going about their businesses – some engaged in conversations, others in deep thought, two or three shouting at each other – this was the mad rush of Johannesburg.

There would always be one or two drunk men staggering, despite it being mid-morning. We passed through various small shops with men and women sitting and others standing outside – Somalis, Nigerians, Zimbabweans and South Africans – easily distinguishable from their accents and dress. Clothes shops, phone shops, taverns and grocery shops, including butcheries, were lined up haphazardly on both sides of the street, along with photocopying shops and hair salons with posters showcasing different hairstyles, with names such as God's Grace Hair Salon or My God Is Good. As a long-term Jozi resident, or maybe just as an African, I quickly knew that these belonged to West Africans, most likely Nigerians. Even their internet cafes have similar-sounding names. Rumours on the streets always had it that the phone shops and internet

cafés were used as fronts for illegal drug dealings, blurring the margins between illegal and legal.

With my bag held tightly to my side and eyes running all over the place as I engaged with Tino, I felt unsettled; I was scared someone would just snatch my bag. For this reason, I had left all my valuables in the car. In my small sling bag were my black notebook and pen, a R50 note, my bankcard and my green bar-coded ID booklet.

I usually do not like moving about with my ID because it is my golden key in South Africa, and IDs are highly sought after by identity thieves. Were I to lose it, I would be as good as dead to the South African government, and all formal portals would be closed to me. At the same time, I needed it in case I was stopped by the police, as they always do, hunting down undocumented migrants. I fell prey to them once in 2011: I had left my passport at home and they came to me, two police women clad in their uniform. 'ID *sisi* [sister],' one of them said, stretching out her hand towards me. This was my first interaction with the police since I had come to South Africa and, my voice cracking with fear, I responded that I had left it home. Pretending to be shocked, she alerted me that the law required me to always carry my identification documents at all times. Taking out my University of Witwatersrand student ID, hoping it would suffice, I showed it to her. Holding it in her hand, looking closely at it, she said, 'Aww, my sister, but what's your problem really? You are giving me a student card, this, you show to your headmaster not the police. Let's go to the police station and we will talk.' Though I was annoyed that she had said 'headmaster' to a university student, I could not express my annoyance or correct her. I also wanted to point out what I thought was obvious: the fact that I had a student ID implied I had a valid student visa. However, there was a more pressing issue: I was about to be arrested. I could not believe I would be making my prison debut over a small issue of 'papers', particularly because I had the needed papers. To cut a long story short, after a few solicitations by the two police officers and a bit of resistance from my side, I ended 'paying' them a 'small fee' to let me go. Since then, I have dreaded moving around Johannesburg without documentation; at the same time, I am scared of losing the same documentation. Both my Zimbabwean passport and my South African ID are in high demand on the streets of Johannesburg.

Tino saw my tenseness as we walked towards his work station, and he patted me on the shoulder: 'Relax *gogo*, you are with me, *tisu anhu acho* [slang for "we are the people/owners here"].' I laughed and asked if it was that obvious that I was scared. 'These people can smell fear,' he said, referring not only to thieves who might want to attack us but to the police officers who were interested in extorting migrants. We stood by his salon

for a bit as he smoked a cigarette and drank the Black Label beer that he had left with one of his friends; then we sat on a small concrete slab next to the traffic lights. As we sat we discussed my research project and he professed to be thinking about who could help 'us' to recruit participants. He proposed we approach his ex- girlfriend: 'Her aunt is a *masithanda* [landlady] and she accommodates lots of Zimbabweans there, including men. Even the guy who took my girlfriend from me is still there. Can you believe, he used to come in with several girlfriends and we all could see it, but she leaves me for the same guy?' While he was speaking, I deduced that he wanted me to go with him to his ex-girlfriend's relatives because he had not gotten over her. Since I had returned from Amsterdam, I had not had a conversation with Tino without him telling me that this girl had left him for another man. I was surprised at his suggestion that I should go and speak to the same man as part of my study.

Tino suggested we go to the house and see who was there anyway, but first he wanted to pass by Bev's place. Bev, an acquaintance, lived two streets away from his corner salon. A Zimbabwean in her early thirties, Bev worked as a street vendor. She sold Zimbabwean products like pork pies, maputi, Charhons biscuits, Cerevita cereal, Mazoe syrup and so on. Tino's brother in Zimbabwe bought the products and sent them to her by bus. In exchange, Bev bought Tino's brother car parts for his business in Harare, Zimbabwe, and put them on the same bus. In this way, they had run their businesses across territorial boundaries. (I would learn later from my study participants that this was a lucrative way of doing business.) Tino suggested we pass by Bev's to get his brother's money. 'Actually, Bev knows a lot of people, especially men; she may help us find people', he reflected as we walked towards her place, while warning me: 'Now this place is dangerous, Gogo, people get attacked here. I have been attacked here more than four times'. (In the course of my study, many participants would confirm that this place, known as the 'corridor', was dangerous.) A stretch of about 200 metres, it looked pretty ordinary to me, other than the presence of lots of young men and boys in small groups along the street. The corridor was not far away from Tino's salon: it was clearly visible from both his corner (and the corner that I would become my main ethnographic site, Uncle Kofi's Corner). As we passed through I could already see the difference – it was quieter, with fewer people walking on the streets and less noise.

In front of the building where Bev stayed, a big poster pasted on a trash bin caught my attention: 'Penis enlargement with Dr Love'. The inscription made me realise that it was not only NGOs that were trying to fix men; so was Dr Love. I chuckled to myself as we entered a high-rise

flat where a uniformed security guard told us to wait in the foyer because 'we did not have IDs'. Although I had mine, I always dreaded leaving it with the security, because of stories I had heard of security workers 'mistakenly' misplacing people's IDs. Tino made a phone call and shortly after, Bev, a fair skinned, short Zimbabwean woman, came down and started conversing with us. The security guard was still perched on a chair in the small cubicle next to the entrance door, listening to our conversation. Bev handed over a couple of R100 notes to Tino, who counted them before pocketing them. Tino thanked her and then told her about my study. We spoke for a while, followed by a moment of silence as we all thought about how we could approach my research. 'Uuum, you said you want to research men, I don't know of many men. I can find out from a few of my friends if they are interested. You can leave your number with me. Otherwise you can also try the church opposite the street, there are always men sitting there', she said pointing across the street towards a church. At Bev's recommendation Tino and I made our way via the big black gate into the churchyard. This would mark the beginning of my nine-month journey at Uncle Kofi's Corner.

At the time of my study, the inner city, the informal market, globalisation and narratives about masculinities were all reflected in the cultural and economic diversity of this area. As illustrated in my consulting Tino and his taking me to Bev, who pointed me to Uncle Kofi's Corner, my recruitment of participants involved convenience sampling and snowballing techniques. Convenience sampling involves recruiting participants who are readily accessible and available. Snowballing entails asking participants to refer me to friends and colleagues who might be interested in the topic (Elfil and Negida 2017).

The recruitment of participants happened more by chance than by plan. For example, while it was not my intention to include Tino in my study, I realised that his story enables me to illustrate how my journey of going into the field was not about going out with a 'blank page' to look for objects (or subjects) of study, who were waiting for me to come into their space to be researched. Rather the field, like the ocean Ferguson described, ends up yielding surprising catches to the anthropologist/fisherman. Here, two migrants on different ongoing journeys found themselves in a particular space at a particular time, and our lives became intertwined. My intention was not to research Tino, firstly because I had already specified my target population and secondly because he was family, which from a strictly scientific perspective seemed problematic to me at the time. Similarly, his intention was not to become part of my study; he was just helping me out. But in what I would liken to Massey's (2005) 'thrown togetherness', I found myself unable to write the story of my research without writing in Tino. Without his familiarity with

the inner city and my familiarity with him, I doubt I would have been able to overcome my fears of working in what was essentially his neighbourhood. Having him nearby made me feel safe and visiting him on my way to and from my 'official' field site provided opportunities to try out the ideas I was putting together based on my research, to ask questions about the area and to begin to conceptualise the specificity of Uncle Kofi's Corner in relation to Tino's Corner. In trying to write Tino out of the early drafts of this dissertation, I also came to question the discrete boundaries of the spaces we define as our 'field sites', not to mention the intellectual dishonesty of concealing the important role played by networks and 'right-hand man' such as Tino in shaping knowledge production in anthropology.

My meeting with Tino is an example of what 'meeting ups' look like. Massey's (2005, 120) work on space conceptualises meeting ups as the meeting of two stories each with its own histories, geographies and spaces. The journey begins with me and Tino headed in one direction: he agrees to help me with my research. In his effort to help, however, he also brought in his issues with his ex-girlfriend. Our stories became entangled and our journeys were thus shaped. We once took a detour to pick up some money from someone who sent us on another detour, this time to a place that would become my 'permanent' stop, while Tino continued on his journey without me. When ongoing trajectories intersect, the outcomes of such meeting ups are unpredictable. My meeting with Tino and finding Uncle Kofi's Corner typify most of my unplanned encounters with people who became participants in my research.

Many of the stories I heard from my study participants involved unplanned encounters, including their journeys to South Africa, where many came not knowing what would come from those trips. In this way, my fieldwork became a series of unpredictable meetings and ongoing stories as I encountered other migrants (Massey 2005). The mobility of migrants means they make journeys that are never finished, just as their identities are never static or complete. Although this might be true for all people, it seems, as Massey argues, to be intensified among migrants who are actively finding their way. In this light, I situate my participants' experiences within the anthropology of becoming (Biehl and Locke 2017; Hillier and Abrahams 2013). Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, the anthropology of becoming is a theory of contingencies rather than pre-identified outcomes (Hillier and Abrahams 2013, 11). As a migrant embarks on a journey, he or she may have aspirations but can never guarantee what will take place or become of them. My journey as an anthropologist has been similar. I could never have predicted where my research ended up taking me. Perhaps this is one of the greatest strengths of ethnographic research: the necessity of being open to the contingencies of one's research site. One might even say that, like a migrant, for an anthropologist to succeed, she must be willing to *(ku)kiya kiya*.

Blurring the lines: researching the familiar, going native

In May 2019, I went back to Johannesburg to conduct follow-up research with a rough draft of my dissertation in hand. During the three weeks I was there, I alternated between Uncle Kofi's Corner and Tino's Corner as I had done during the nine months of my field work conducted the year before. While Uncle Kofi's Corner had been my official study site in my mind, I found myself spending large amounts of time at Tino's Corner too, as I always passed by to greet him on my way to or from Uncle Kofi's Corner.

Because I had for a long time thought of Tino's space as a site of my own leisure, I failed to see it as a potential site for my work. Like many anthropologists opting for 'impersonal facts', I thought of the men at Uncle Kofi's Corner as my study participants, somehow ontologically different from Tino and his friends. This way of thinking continued for a long time despite similarities between the two locations, including that both spaces attracted migrant men from other African countries. By differentiating men at Uncle Kofi's Corner as study participants and men at Tino's as personal relations and friends, I had fallen into the trap of wanting to depersonalise my connection to the field, treating Uncle Kofi's Corner as an ethnographic site where I could accumulate data from 'other' men (Behar 1996).

During this follow-up research, I realised how spending time with Tino and his friends shaped my interactions with men at Uncle Kofi's Corner. For example, some of my inquiries at Uncle Kofi's Corner were informed by what I had witnessed at Tino's Corner and vice versa. Similarly, I saw parallels in the experiences that men from both spaces shared. For example, the issues of papers, jobs and xenophobia affected men from both sites. This is what Behar (1996, 101) meant when she observed that 'sometimes anthropology comes close to home'. Characterising this as a form of native anthropology, Behar (1996, 28) describes the latter as 'when scholars claim a personal connection to the places in which they work'.

She further expounds that 'as those who used to be "the natives" have become scholars in their own right, often studying their home communities and nations, the lines between participant and observer, friend and stranger, aboriginal and alien are no longer so easily drawn' (Behar 1996, 5428). Behar (1996, 13) discussed what it means for an African American legal scholar like Patricia Williams who, in her study of contract law, discovered that her great-grandmother was sold to a white lawyer, asserting that such discoveries bring a twist of 'urgency and poignancy' to the facts. This was my experience at Tino's place.

Behar makes it clear that reflexive anthropology is not about including everything 'personal', but about the importance of including elements that help

to tell the story. I did not have to include all the experiences of my migrant relatives in this thesis; however, such stories gave me insight, as an insider, into things that might not have been accessible if I were differently positioned. Men at Tino's Corner used a language more raw and vulgar than men at Uncle Kofi's Corner. I concluded that it was because the men at Tino's did not view me as a researcher interested in their lives, but as his 'young' Gogo. At Uncle Kofi's Corner, I was a professional researcher and many participants viewed me this way. I always had my black notebook and pen to take notes. These different positions led me to experience the field differently, providing me with multiple and varied understandings of my research topic.

At times at Tino's Corner, I noted down interesting conversations and catchy statements, after asking for consent. By capturing such comments, my intention was to verify or share these with men at Uncle Kofi's Corner. During the writing phase, looking back at some of the notes and recollecting my experiences, I was compelled to consider Tino's space as an important ethnographic site. Some of the information that men at Uncle Kofi's Corner withheld I solicited from men at Tino's Corner or from other relatives, for example, how people overstayed their passports or how they gave their passports to Zimbabwe-bound bus drivers to renew their stamps at the border.

While my study could be categorised as 'native anthropology', the term 'native' in anthropology has been widely contested in relation to race, citizenship and nativity, as Nyamnjoh (2012a) argues. While being a migrant would disqualify me as native to South Africa, being black did qualify me as a native 'from elsewhere'; as Nyamnjoh (2012a, 73) writes, 'Nativity is tied to blackness'. Nyamnjoh's (2012a, 73) term 'native outsiders' describes researchers like me, 'who move away from their birthplaces and native lands of origin to other native areas or to cities where, in the case of South Africa, non-natives – whites – reside'. This also positioned me an insider-outsider ethnographer or 'halfie', a person whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education or parentage (Abu-Lughod 1991, 137).

While I often viewed myself as an insider given my status as a black migrant, some of my participants considered me an outsider due to my economic and social class and gender. For example, to differentiate me from another South African woman with the same first name, who also frequented Uncle Kofi's Corner, I was called 'Linda Amsterdam' or 'Dutch woman'. Both these terms made me feel uncomfortable as, notwithstanding my affiliation with University of Amsterdam, I did not identify as either. I rejected the 'outsider' label as I felt I belonged with them, and so I insisted that they called me 'Linda Zimbabwe' or just 'Linda'. But street corners being what they are, the men at Uncle Kofi's Corner continued to tease me.

Migrant studying migrants: research subjects

Convenience and purposive sampling allowed me to spend time in places where migrants congregated; therefore, my study sample was largely comprised of migrants. As a migrant woman from Zimbabwe, I was able to relate to the experiences of the majority of my research participants who came from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Ghana, Rwanda, Djibouti, Guinea and Congo (for a full list of research participants, see Annex 2). I also recruited a few South Africans who had come from other provinces such as KwaZulu Natal and Limpopo, whose life in Johannesburg was shaped by their internal migration. When I first came to South Africa, I stayed for two months in the same neighbourhood where my majority of study participants resided, before moving to the outskirts of Johannesburg. During that time, I experienced similar anxieties and fears of living in the inner city. Although I had the necessary papers, like many migrant women I lived in fear of being harassed by police, immigration officials and abusive men.

As a Zimbabwean woman, I felt I was able to relate to my Zimbabwean research participants on a deeper level than I did to migrants from other African countries, not least of all due to linguistic affinity. Commenting on my opportunity as a PhD student in the Netherlands, several of my study participants – particularly from Zimbabwe – made comments such as ‘Sister, how did you do [or make] it?’ or ‘Which God led you to this?’, which were always followed by ‘How can I also enter?’ or ‘How can I get a visa?’ In these questions, they identified me as one of them, one who got lucky or experienced ‘grace’, as those who were religious saw it. The luck was that I ‘managed to get out of the web’ of precarity and uncertainty that had entangled most migrants in Johannesburg. I had experienced that myself, when Men and Boys told me I could not study with them. Such refusals are common for migrants, particularly for those without the requisite papers. Migrants live their lives ready to make the next move. In response to comments about my good luck, I would remark, ‘*Kungo kiya kiya*’, implying ‘I am also trying to make ends meet’, using the language of *kukiya kiya* that we shared. I assumed that they would understand what I meant. Their understanding would come from a place where we had a shared understanding of the life of a migrant. My Zimbabwean participants did not question my claim, because most of them understood the irrelevance of one’s education level when it came to *kukiya kiya*, in fact many Zimbabwean graduates wait tables in Johannesburg. But while I could relate to a number of my participants at varying levels, I also remained an outsider. My experiences as a female migrant were different from those of most of my study participants, who were men, and the fact that I could travel freely back to Zimbabwe or between South Africa and Netherlands, using my highly valued papers, also made me somewhat of an outsider.

Legal, social and economic status of study participants

Few of those who participated in my research had the requisite papers, a valid passport and visa, to live and work in South Africa. This was a legal divide between us. Such papers determined what each migrant was allowed to do in the country, for example, to work, study or just visit. Many participants had taken the 'normal' route of other migrants, overstaying and arranging with someone else for their passport to be stamped at the border, a process locally termed 'stamping out'. Once the passport was stamped out, one was officially recorded as out of the country. It was now one's job to dodge police patrols in Johannesburg. When a person wanted to go back home, they would take their passport to the border and have it stamped, then use it to go out. In this way a person could avoid an overstayed stamp. Or if they overstayed, they could provide a small fee to pay an immigration officer at the border to backdate the stamp.

A number of participants held asylum seeker status, with a temporary permit given to migrants who had applied for refugee status. Asylum seekers were required to keep renewing their permit, until their refugee application was adjudicated. This process ideally took up to six months. While this status was meant to be temporary, it had come to be a permanent status for some of my study participants, particularly those from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and other countries with a history of war.

I was privileged not to have gone through such cumbersome processes of trying to get papers or dodge police. When I first went to South Africa, in 2009, I applied for an Accompanying Spouse Visa, as I was accompanying my husband who held a Special Skills Permit. After two years in South Africa, we applied for permanent residence status and this was granted to us in less than a year. As soon as we got permanent residency, we applied for the green bar-coded IDs that accorded us all the benefits and privileges of a South African citizen except for voting rights. With permanent residency, doors opened for me that would not have been the case had I any other status. A case in point would be my PhD scholarship awarded by the National Research Foundation of South Africa. The call had specified that 'only South African citizens and permanent residents could apply'. To access the application form, I had to enter my ID number, after which a page with a plethora of funding opportunities greeted me. I had the privilege to choose which scholarship to apply for. Most of my relatives and those participating in my study did not have this opportunity. Comparing myself to them, I was cognisant of the chasm between us as far as the law and the formal economy was concerned.

Apart from residency papers, my level of education also placed me in a different social and economic space from most of my study participants, as they

did not have university degrees. Two Zimbabweans in my study were university graduates but could not access the formal market. As one said, 'Joburg is an equaliser: a graduate does the same work as a Grade 7'. This wry statement illustrates that without appropriate papers, educational qualifications were irrelevant. I knew several Zimbabweans who were graduates and who had worked as teachers in Zimbabwe. But in South Africa, they ended up taking jobs as security guards, domestic workers, waiters, casual workers or small-scale entrepreneurs. Others chose criminal paths, becoming identity thieves or gang robbers. A few of the luckier ones found work within the government and others in the comparatively lucrative NGO sector, particularly among NGOs that advocated for human rights and equality.

Legal papers and the paradox of belonging

While my legal papers privileged me in certain ways, the privilege was situational and depended on space and time. Papers were not a master key that would open all doors, especially as far as my research was concerned. My relationship with Tino exemplifies the paradox of papers, citizenship and belonging, and how it also shaped my fieldwork. Tino and I, both Zimbabweans and cousins, stood on opposite sides of the borderline of legality; I was officially accepted in the country and he was not. The South African government, through its immigration laws, had already labelled and systematically excluded Tino as an illegal 'outsider' who was not permitted to cross the border despite his insistence on coming back. While the South African economy accepted me, with my green bar-coded ID book that afforded me an opportunity to freely study, work and live in South Africa, it denied him the same opportunity by denying him a visa. But when it came to moving 'freely' in the inner city, my green bar-coded ID book was not as helpful; rather, it increased my risk of being attacked. Tino, as a man and more specifically a man of the streets, was more at liberty to move about than I was. As a result, he became my guide and source of protection, playing a critical role in my study.

Tino's street credibility reflected his informal role as a hustler, and by relying on him, I was able to achieve my objectives as a PhD student. My reliance on him also reflected my acknowledgement, even endorsement, of his tough masculinity vis-à-vis my vulnerable femininity on the dangerous streets of Johannesburg. In other settings, his masculinity would be undesirable if not threatening. For me, this illustrates how modes of being, becoming and belonging are negotiated and renegotiated as contexts vary. Further, in this study, the issue of (il)legality helps us to see how men and women mapped urban spaces to create their own centres of citizenship, thereby reconstructing the ideas of margins and centres as they relate to marginalisation. I explore this further in Chapter 7.

‘Migrant woman studying men in a dangerous place’?

As a female researcher interested in researching men and entering male-dominated spaces, my presence shaped and was shaped by gender dynamics. Before I began fieldwork, I knew my multiple social identities or subjectivities would expose me to various risks in the field, including gendered violence, racism and xenophobia. But I also knew the same position came with associated privileges. That is why I always struggled to find a straightforward answer to questions that presumed to place me in the (vulnerable) ‘migrant woman in a dangerous place’ category. I acknowledge such a category was not unfounded in light of several studies that have established that cross-gender research, particularly when the researcher is a female, is fraught with challenges that include gender discrimination, violence, assault and unsolicited sexual advances (Pakasi 2018; Bucaris, Sandra and Urbanik 2018). While I had my share of challenges, my experiences were too complex to be accounted for by my migration status and/or my gender alone.

As a migrant woman I was at higher risk of assault,⁷ but being Zimbabwean did not define or shape every aspect of my fieldwork. As a black woman I was no different from the majority of the other black women walking in the streets of Johannesburg as long as I did not speak. For fear of exposing myself, I usually kept quiet when in public spaces such as taxis or on the street, or I would adopt South African slang – ‘After the robot’ or ‘shot left/right’ – if I were in a taxi. Having stayed in South Africa long enough, I have had to answer this question a couple of times: ‘If you are African, why do you speak in English then?’ While I understand much of the Zulu language, I can only speak a few phrases and this limited my conversation to small talk, preventing me from significant engagement with the world outside of migrant communities.

The paradox is that my spoken English might incite assault not only from South Africans but also from fellow Zimbabweans from the Ndebele ethnic group, whose animosity toward Shona (my ethnic group) continues in Zimbabwe. ‘It’s our fellow brothers who are busy attacking us in the guise of South Africans’, Tino once told me, revealing a complicated manifestation of the so-called ‘xenophobia by South Africans’. To avoid being attacked, I followed the advice I had received from study participants about which places to avoid. There were also times I avoided public places altogether by driving to and from my study site, thus limiting the risk of exposing myself as a migrant. My main ethnographic sites were

⁷ As highlighted in the introduction and further explored in Chapter 6, South Africa is known as the rape capital of the world and the prevalence of violence against women exceeds the global level.

spaces occupied predominantly by migrants, making them relatively safe for me as a migrant myself. A few South African women, however, also came to Uncle Kofi's Corner, and joined in the conversations taking place. Without being planned, so often, conversations centred on men's (experiences) versus women's, resulting in me and the women standing on the same side of dialogue or debate. In these instances, my being a migrant (woman) was less relevant than my being a woman.

I felt comfortable identifying myself as a Zimbabwean woman among my migrant participants, as this gave us a shared identity as migrants. But there were times I also had to distance myself from this identification based on a stereotype of inner-city Zimbabwean women as prostitutes. 'After all, many of your sisters, that's what they do here in South Africa', Khulu said, while explaining to me that Zimbabwean men, particularly those from Uncle Kofi's Corner, were initially suspicious of me because they did not understand why a woman would spend so much time with men if not to seduce them. To disassociate from this stereotype, I was quick to state that I was married with three kids. I also said this to ward off sexual advances, having heard that men are put off by a woman with children. Despite openly talking about my marriage and children, a few men doubted my claims based on the absence of my husband, who was in the Netherlands during the time of my fieldwork. I also used my religion as leverage to gain trust with participants, as most were Christian or Muslim. Because Uncle Kofi's Corner was situated within a church compound, I felt comfortable revealing my own Christian beliefs and the fact that I regularly attended church. While this helped some to accept me, others questioned how Christianity and intellectualism could coexist. To prove my Christianity, I joined their conversations about faith, including sharing with them the news that my pastor in Johannesburg had been shot in February 2018. This sparked empathy on the part of my participants, eliciting from them stories of friends and acquaintances who had lost their lives to gun violence. However, my Christianity would sometimes be questioned when I did not take sides in religious conversations; when I cited my need to remain neutral as a researcher, this did not go well with some fellow Christians who felt I was a 'lukewarm Christian'.

Some of the Christians rebuked me for staying away from my husband for too long. 'How do you think he is [sexually] surviving?' one asked. Others cautioned me to be a wise wife and not let the 'love for education destroy my marriage', while they entreated me to pray against 'falling into temptation'. Some men told me not to expect my husband to be faithful. But others commented that I had married a 'good man' who would 'let' me study, while he 'took care of the children'. 'Take care of that man', one man urged. I found myself having to navigate the prevailing norms and position myself in ways that helped gain the trust of my participants while reducing my risk of assault or harassment.

My negotiation and construction of different kinds of femininities was not so different from the experiences of my interlocutors who were aware of negative public views about them as men and as migrants. Like me, they sometimes tried to distance themselves from such stereotypes, trying to distinguish themselves as non-violent hardworking men, distinct from the dominant view of problematic masculinity. Khulu, a study participant, explained that in 'South Africa ... all men are considered rapists'. Because of this, the men I researched often tried to assure me that I was safe with them, but not from 'outsiders,' meaning others on the streets. For example, Uncle Kofi never allowed me to go outside the church premises on my own; he always assigned Khulu to walk with me. On the church premises, he assured me: 'You are safe here'. In this way, they constructed themselves and their space as safe for me, just as I presented myself to assure them that their stories were safe with me.

As a female researcher, I was at risk of experiencing various forms of assault. Just before commencing fieldwork, I heard news that one of my female colleagues had been assaulted by a male research participant. Knowing how dangerous my study setting could be, I initially decided to always have a man accompany me. I started by having my brother accompany me to the inner city until I had found someone I could trust. Because I had decided not to drive my car in the inner city for fear of theft, I would leave my car at the University of the Witwatersrand and my brother would walk with me in the streets to my study site. However, having my older brother with me proved problematic when we found ourselves participating in conversations on 'shameful topics' (between family members), such as sex. For example, we once attended an HIV and AIDS workshop together. The facilitator of the workshop started demonstrating how to use a condom, using a banana. This was uncomfortable for both of us, and after that encounter, my brother refused to accompany me again. As is the norm in my ethnic group, I relate to my brother as I relate to my father, and so despite being siblings, certain topics are out of bounds for us.

Despite my fear, I started walking alone to my field site. To avoid attention, I avoided wearing flashy clothes, carrying big bags or obviously carrying my phone. At the same time, I avoided dressing shabbily to avoid attracting attention. Rumour had it that xenophobic South Africans or police officers could easily pick foreigners by their dress. Hence, I tried to adopt the dress code of the majority of women I saw in the streets: jeans, t-shirt and sneakers. If not walking I would take a taxi and my cousin Tino would pick me up from where I was dropped off. With Tino's help, I found Uncle Kofi's Corner, and Tino accompanied me there for about a week, before telling me: 'Uncle Kofi is a good man, you are safe here, but if you need me, just call me'.

There were times I questioned if I was really safe, especially in the early days. Although I could not voice my fear to anyone, I later would learn that while some

men 'respected' me as a sister, married woman and mother, there were also some who feared me. This was because of my class background. I had been placed in the category of an 'empowered' or 'dangerous to date' type of woman, the same way my interlocutors described South African women. Khulu often expressed to me that he was scared of dating South African women as they could easily turn against him and accuse him of rape. Later, I would find out that South African women were seen as empowered women with 'too many' rights, because of laws such as the Domestic Violence Act and Sexual Offences Act, which aim at protecting women from gender-based violence. South African women were also perceived to be financially well off, increasing their power, and thus not desirable for intimate relationships. Thus, while initially I feared these men, I learned that they also feared me, albeit for different causes.

This perception was exacerbated by the fact that I owned a car; most of the men in my study did not. At the commencement of my study I had anticipated this perception, so in the first two months I left my car at the university or at Tino's Corner to avoid giving the impression that I had money. I feared this would result in prospective participants hoping to get financial benefits from contributing to the research. When eventually I did park at Uncle Kofi's Corner, after I had built rapport and some trust, many were shocked and asked where I had been hiding it. Others would make comments insinuating that I was 'upper class'; I always refuted this by explaining the car was my husband's. I also did this to prevent questions about where I got the money for a car, especially as a woman and a student. In these exchanges, I received comments revealing participants' perceptions around cars, wealth and masculinities. One man said: 'Yeah, yours [husband] is what we call an organised man, he has his stuff in order'. I used such sentiments and perceptions as a springboard to explore participants' understandings of money and gender. For example, when I would ask why a woman could not have a car that was not associated with a man, I was told that 'an economically independent woman' was 'intimidating' or 'lacked respect'.

I was surprised to learn that despite telling my participants that the car belonged to my husband, some men still thought I had a 'sugar daddy' who had bought me the car because they had never seen the husband I claimed to have. Others thought I was working as an undercover agent for the Zimbabwean Government Central Intelligence Unit. While I did not know this at first, I had noticed that some men, particularly Zimbabweans, avoided me and were more sceptical of my intentions than men from other countries. Their suspicion was amplified when they learnt that I had a car, and they began to caution each other to mind what they said in front of me. One woman said this openly: 'Sister, if you think I'm going to say bad things about my country forget it. I love my country'. I responded that I was not interested in hearing her political views. Such interactions show the complexities associated with my claims as a native ethnographer, making clear that my fieldwork was not straightforward. While I

had expected to be well received by fellow Zimbabweans because of our shared identity, some avoided me because of the same identity.

Because I had a car, I was in a privileged position in that I could move easily through or avoid certain public spaces and public transport, and this minimised my risk of assault as both a woman and a migrant. However, owning a car also exposed me to the risk of being robbed or hijacked, and the risk of attracting attention from disgruntled South Africans who felt foreigners were advancing at their expense. I encountered this when attending a workshop on xenophobia. The facilitator of the workshop, also a migrant, and I were the only ones who had arrived in cars to a workshop attended by more than 20 participants. This attracted attention; one South African woman expressed disdain for migrants, complaining that 'Zimbabweans are parasites' coming to get resources from South Africa. I became the living example of her claim. Out of fear I did not go back to the workshop again, especially as there were, at the time, reports of shops and cars belonging to foreigners being burnt in that area.

Data collection methods

At both Uncle Kofi's and Tino's corners, my main method of data collection was 'deep hanging out' (Geertz 1999) and 'go along' conversations (Buceris, Sandra and Urbanik 2018), which entailed spending time observing and participating in informal conversations, which in most cases were group focused. Topics of discussion usually came from the people around me, although in a few instances I would ask specific questions relating to my project. For example, I would ask, 'What is good man?' or would repeat a story I heard elsewhere to gain their perspective. Toward the end of my fieldwork, I began collecting visuals in form of images and videos. This began with Khulu who was trying to have 'nice' photos taken for me to use to find him a Dutch woman. Initially we took the photos using phones, until he introduced me to Lodza, a professional filmmaker who frequented the corner. I contracted Lodza and we began taking photos of the city and recording videos of interviews. During my follow-up research, Uncle Kofi requested to have his birthday celebration filmed, which provided an opportunity for me to ask people to share their stories and memories of Uncle Kofi on camera. I also used audio-visual material I accessed from a WhatsApp group associated with Kofi's Shop and other social media outlets such as Instagram and Facebook to collect information, particularly in relation to violence.

In addition to the more than 50 people whom I interviewed at Uncle Kofi's Corner and Tino's Corner, and their friends, I ended up following four NGOs that worked in the same field as Men and Boys and I attended nine of their events. These events included workshops, community dialogues, think tank meetings and commemorations of special days, such as the International Day for the

Elimination of Violence Against Women. In addition to participant observation and informal conversations, I also had individual conversations, in the form of in-depth interviews to clarify issues, with 13 people involved in the NGO sector as participants, employees or volunteers. Most events I attended were part of bigger projects, and I did not gain a full understanding of the context of those individual projects. For example, community dialogues by Men and Boys were embedded in larger projects using a 'gender-transformative approach' that aimed to address structural concerns such as legislation, religion and politics. According to Dworkin and colleagues (2015), this approach is more effective at transforming gender practices at an individual level, but its long-term impact on transforming societies is still unclear. Scholars have called for more rigorous evaluation utilising qualitative research to assess both the intended and unintended consequences of gender-transformative approaches (Peacock, Khumalo, and Mcnab 2004). My aim, however, was not to evaluate the performance or impact of individual interventions, activities or events. Rather it was on how individual men positioned themselves as they participated in these activities. How did they relate to the narrative of problematic masculinities and the interventions that targeted them? I was also interested in how the NGOs positioned themselves in relation to the same narrative.

Ethical considerations

When Men and Boys denied me access, I felt disappointed. I pondered over the possible undisclosed reasons why they refused to grant me permission to conduct research with them. Were they trying to hide something? Upon reflection, I came to accept that the NGO, like any individual who I wished to recruit, had the right to say 'no' to participation. All participants had the right not to disclose something if they wished not to; their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. In my ethics clearances, both the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research (AISSR) Ethics Board and the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) Research Ethics Committee (REC) (protocol number: H17/0638) asked me to protect my participants' autonomy in their decisions to participate. I committed not to judge anyone and to protect the well-being, safety and dignity of all my research participants. I had clearly articulated that non-participation would not hurt prospective participants in any way. The HSRC had pointed out that I needed to be careful what I might write about NGOs as many people's livelihoods depended on the sustainability of these organisations. As their sustainability depended on their good standing with donors, my research should not jeopardise their funding.

I interpreted Men and Boys' decision not to continue with my study as a necessary strategic move to protect the organisation from possible risk that could

be detrimental to funding streams. While one might be tempted to view such behaviour cynically, HSRC's framing made me aware of the high economic stakes in the NGO world.

I felt ethically conflicted when it came to including friends and relatives in the study. I was particularly worried about the issue of consent. To what extent was their consent voluntary? However, my recruitment of my relatives and friends was different from the way I recruited my 'official' study participants, such as the men at Uncle Kofi's Corner. In the heat of sharing stories and certain activities I would say, 'This one I am going to include in my study – ok?' I got varied responses, such as, 'For real, will this help you?' 'Ok. You can include this part, but not this....', 'Ummm, I don't think I am comfortable with that', or 'As long as you don't say my name'. Through such negotiations, I requested consent, and I always assured them that I would not use their names or mention how I knew them, whether as a relative, friend or former colleague. 'It's just the story that I will use', I would assure them. I also realised that with regard to seeking consent, I was highly sensitive when it came to my relatives and friends because I did not want to take advantage of our relationships.

Before I reached the decision to include friends and relatives, I had experienced another ethical dilemma. While men (and women) in my study had shared experiences that were quite familiar with what was going on in my social life or around me, I initially had decided to withhold sharing my own personal stories. However, as I continued with my 'ethnographic gaze' on certain groups of people, with the assumption that they were the different 'other', I felt the heavy weight of guilt engulfing me. I found myself asking the question: If these men and women have given me the privilege of observing their lives and their vulnerability, how come I am not exposing my own vulnerability? If my study participants had told me that they were 'illegal' migrants with no papers, why hadn't I explained to them that some of my friends and relatives were in the same position?

Looking at it in this way helped me to step off my pedestal and become more empathetic towards my study participants and their experiences. Including close relations in my study influenced my understanding of ethics as more relationship based rather than just requirements specified by an ethics board. Of course, there were certain details that I could not disclose in this study because they involved someone close to me, and I decided not to disclose similar details, even anonymously, for the other participants. Some might suggest that this diluted my objectivity, and perhaps it did, but it also enabled me to develop empathy toward those who participated and also to sharpen my own thinking about what to include in this dissertation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have detailed the process of data collection, paying special attention to how my various subjectivities enabled me to see and experience different urban spaces. My fieldwork became in part a personal journey, where I had to draw on personal resources, kinsmen and friends; it was a quest to make do, and to do so in the face of uncertainty and fear. My work in the field consisted largely of encounters or meeting up with other migrants who, like me, were also trying to make do in the face of uncertainty, precarity, vulnerability and disappointment. I understand Uncle Kofi's Corner and Tino's Corner as characterised by the 'contemporaneous existence of a plurality of trajectories; a simultaneity of stories so far' (Massey 2005, 9). As I share the stories of the men at these corners, I seek to present my participants not as a group of men 'stuck' at a specific and unchanging corner, but rather as a meeting up of journeys and on-going stories, mine included. I did not approach the corners as a 'blank page', ready to research a group of men who were waiting for me. Rather this was a meeting up of multiple histories in the process of becoming and thus was never fully finished. I use these stories to illuminate the journeys of these men in relation to my journey. By including myself, I seek to acknowledge how my moving into this space altered it (Massey 2005, 120), and, in turn, how I was altered in my efforts to negotiate my multiple subject positions. And like my study participants, my negotiations did not shape me into one static identity. Rather it was a process of becoming.