Autoethnographic Realisation of Legitimacy of Voice: A Poetic Trail of Forming Researcher Identity

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Abstract: During my research with home-based care volunteers in South Africa I used autoethnography and poetic reflection to document the parallel realisation of my changing identity as a researcher and the home-based care volunteers' realisation of their identity as significant contributors to the HIV/AIDS care and support networks in their community. I explored how the concepts of space and witnessing were operative in the realisation of a legitimate identity for the participants and me. Physical space or distance from familiar environments, experiences and ideas promoted alternative perspectives and stimulated the development of an understanding of personal identity. Dialogical space created through engagement with others encouraged identity development in both different and similar ways for me as a researcher and the participants. In this article, I recount my role as a witness to the participants' realisation of identity whilst concurrently being witnessed by others in the process of developing my identity as a researcher. Witnessing is recognised as acknowledgement and affirmation in the process of identity development. A series of poems written during and after the primary data collection illustrate aspects of the discussion.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

In this article, I present my experience of using poetry as a reflective tool to facilitate my personal insight as a researcher and how this process contributed to the results of my research. I present poetry as a reflective medium that allowed me to assimilate and process swathes of "emotion-infused" data. Poetic reflection offered a means to drift in and out of the data without completely losing touch with the content of a research study. [1]

A postmodern perspective is imperative for ethnography to remain contemporary and relevant in diverse global contexts. Performative social science encompasses in part the efforts of social science researchers to explore the arts as an alternative to traditional representations of research (GUINEY YALLOP, DE

VALLEJO & WRIGHT, 2008). Poetry as a medium of documenting autoethnography attends to this through merging conceptual, cognitive and emotive aspects of human experience. It allows for audiences to concurrently participate in the researcher's experience and make subjectively meaningful interpretations by appealing to the audience as hermeneutic beings. Autoethnographic poetic reflection encourages links between the personal and political that can lead to novel understandings about the shared humanity of researcher, participant and audience thereby reducing "othering" in research (CHAWLA, 2008). [2]

Qualitative researchers acknowledge that interpretive acts of meaning-making are always located in contextually unique social environments, times, and places. Their intention is to render these contexts visible through depth and richness in the descriptions of human talk about experiences behaviour (CLARKE, FEBBRARO, HATZIPANTELIS & NELSON, 2005). Such researchers are interested in "metaphoric generalisablity", referring to how qualitative data resonates with the spirit of human experience and how it also fully resonates with an engaged audience (FURMAN, LIETZ & LANGER, 2006; ELLIS, ADAMS & BOCHNER, 2010). [3]

Concerns about the unexamined power of the researcher, as exemplified by positivist researchers' exclusive responsibility to determine objectivity, led to an emergence of feminist versions of reflexivity. These aimed to reframe power balances between participants and researchers where the voices of participants are seen as equivalent to the voices of researchers in data representation (HERTZ, 1997). In this vein, persistent emphasis came to be placed on community, relationality and the democratic involvement of participants (LINCOLN & REASON, 1996). Qualitative researchers no longer question the need for reflexivity in qualitative research, but question what form reflexivity should take. A more explicit focus on the reconstructed nature of researchers' reflexive accounts is required. [4]

Acknowledgement of narrative reconstruction in developing reflexive accounts creates ethical research. This should include the explicit admission that the researcher's role cannot be fully captured in data production (BISHOP & SHEPHERD, 2011). Researchers need various competencies, and participants need emerging competencies in this type of research environment. Amongst these are interpersonal, political, emotional, moral and ethical competence, intellectual openness and creativity, and spiritual qualities. Building on these ideas, DENZIN (2000, p.261) challenged qualitative researchers to engage in a new movement in qualitative inquiry, described as "a radical ethical aesthetic" in which researchers move from the personal (the reflexive relational) into the political (reflexive activist), by employing emotional critique to political action. FINLEY (2003) proposed that arts-based inquiry in the form of poetry, narrative theatre, creative writing, etc. could be the catalyst for movement into the radical, ethical aesthetic. I found that the medium of poetic reflection addressed the issues of voice, identity and reflexivity, for me as a researcher. [5]

Writing may be regarded as a method of inquiry, as a way of discovering and knowing, not simply a way of telling (RICHARDSON & ADAMS-ST. PIERRE, 2008). In presenting writing as constructional, RICHARDSON and ADAMS-ST. PIERRE envision writing and the writing process as a multi-textual space where various voices dynamically contend for positions. This is a space in which partisan, partial, personal and perhaps even political voice can find illustration without necessarily approaching imposed, resolute yet inauthentic clarity. [6]

A consciously reflexive position facilitates researchers' attempts to engage with, and empathetically appreciate, the private and emotional experiences of research participants. In the process of reflection, researchers may share with participants intimate and personal reflections of their own as they interview and observe study participants. [7]

Autoethnographies situate personal experience within social and cultural contexts and invite provocative questions about social agency and socio-cultural constraints. According to JENSEN-HART and WILLIAMS (2010), "good" autoethnography is a distinctive method of garnering knowledge within inter-subjective realities, which concurrently creates critical reflection. DENZIN (2006) submits that ethnographic research practices are not innocuous but performative, pedagogical and political. Ethnographers enact the world in writing and talk, through performances that are messy and instructive. They teach readers about the world and their views of it using moral and political methods. Autoethnography challenges, contests or endorses the official, hegemonic ways of seeing and representing *the Other* through this enactment. As a critical methodology, it endeavours to disrupt and deconstruct cultural and methodological practices performatively for the benefit of a "more just, democratic, and egalitarian society" (p.422). Autoethnography creates possibilities for evocative and imaginative ways for researchers to represent realities, for themselves and research participants. The growing acceptance of autoethnography presents an opportunity for researchers to claim voice and authorise personal acts writing about self and others (MAGUIRE, 2006). [8]

Poetry may be preferable to other forms of representation for some kinds of knowledge and useful for seeing beyond the conventions of sociological representation (CLARKE et al., 2005; FURMAN et al., 2006; LEGGO, 2011; PRENDERGAST, 2009; RICHARDSON, 2002). The field of social science representation is transformed through individual researchers pushing the boundaries of their domain (PIIRTO, 2002). The convention of using standard prose as a representational form for interview material is simply one possible literary technique and not the singular legitimate medium of knowledge representation (RICHARDSON, 2002). Poetry is not bound by the rules of grammar that limit expression, despite its use of linguistic symbolism. The use of elements, such as metaphor and other symbolic imagery, enables access to deep, unconscious material that is only available in the symbolic manifestations of poetry. It allows for the expression of deep-seated symbolic material, and the development of a distinctively personal voice that communicates the idiosyncratic realities uncovered in the autoethnographic process (KEMPLER, 2003). [9]

The intersection of poetry and autoethnography falls within the description of evocative autoethnography. Autoethnography usually stems from researchers' emotions, or connects emotions to research in some form. In writing authoethnography, the researcher/poet must call on issues that are personally resonant whilst concurrently reflecting on research processes and outcomes. SAUNDERS (2006, p.504) maintains that poetry is a form of research in that it is tangible, an aesthetic object, "made in language". The silences within poems stir the memory and kindle the unconscious by saying just enough, to allow the audience to connect with the provocative space central to the issue. It is the skilful juxtaposition of silences and words in poetry which gives poetic work meaning. This is what makes poetry emotionally evocative for the audience. Audience members experience poems as hermeneutic beings who construct understanding in distinctive ways that contribute to their enduring and coherent constitution (BERRY, 2006). Poetry seeks to examine the meaning-making opportunities in everyday life by means of close examination through an alternative creative lens. [10]

In the process of qualitative research, it often happens that once the data is collected and sits as a mass of recordings, the researcher is typically apprehensive about commencing the analysis process. Of course, once one is familiar with a specific path it is difficult to seek other routes or to realise that one is on an unproductive journey. Poetic reflection can offer direction by simultaneously offering the researcher a means of consciously addressing apprehension and beginning to process initial impressions of the data. At later stages, when the researcher is immersed in the data, poetic reflection can be used to access different perspectives and impressions on the data as various dimensions emerge. The latter ordinarily becomes increasingly difficult as the researcher becomes more familiar with the data. Poetic devices such as metaphor, imagery, personification, etc. can stimulate different levels of thought and facilitate creative thinking. KINSELLA (2006) suggests that reflection on practice rooted in poetic form (poetic reflection) can illuminate tensions, highlight previously silenced experiences and generate new interpretations. Poetry emerges as a non-linear process in research and has the potential to shift the researcher perspectives, to take alternative stances, and to view research fields more critically (CHAWLA, 2008) [11]

In the next section I present an orientation to the study which prompted the autoethnographic process. This is followed by a discussion of how the concepts of space and witnessing were operative in the development of identity for the research participants and me. Alluding to the performative turn in social science and the more recent attention to artistic representation in performance, the discussion is interspersed with poems that I composed during and after the fieldwork. The poems are an autoethnographic representation of the discussion and have a performative and illustrative purpose. I discuss the function of space as an element that affords physical distance and a dialogical forum to stimulate novel perspectives. I consider the operation of witnessing and being witnessed as validation and acknowledgement for entry and perceived legitimacy in a

community of practice for myself as a researcher and the participants as home-based care volunteers (HBCVs). [12]

2. Context and Orientation to the Study

Current national HIV policies or strategies do not address many central aspects of HIV/AIDS care and support. Volunteers commonly provide the bulk of much needed psychosocial and physical care services and support. Family and community members, volunteers, particularly women, whose contribution to the HIV/AIDS response often goes unrecognised and unsupported, meet most care and support responsibilities (UNAIDS, 2012). [13]

In South Africa, most home-based care volunteers are unemployed women in the community who care for AIDS patients who are in an advanced stage and others who are unable to care for themselves (AKINTOLA, 2010). Volunteers are not related to patients and commitment is evident when one realises that there is limited access to running water and electricity in the community and daily household chores might include fetching water from a communal tap, collecting firewood and tending to the family food garden in addition to cooking and cleaning the family home before tending to patients. Local government gives some of the women a stipend of R600-R1200 ($70-$140) a month, referred to as "soap money". Most of this is spent on transport for minibus taxis (the only available public transport) in the hilly community, where houses are widely spread over a large area. HBCVs regularly use this money to buy food, soap and other necessities for patients that their patients cannot afford. Volunteers' own family members may also contribute to their "work". In the AIDS care and support hierarchy, HBCVs occupy the lowest rung. As such, these women have been all but invisible as a group and up to now remain so as individuals. The women participating in community-based AIDS care and support act out of altruistic sentiment and communal cultural expectations, and hope to possibly gain access to paid work and have the opportunity for self-improvement through recognition they receive during the course of the work (AKINTOLA, 2010). [14]

Little is known about HBCVs' identity and their reasons for volunteering. The aim of this study was to understand the social construction of identity in HBCVs. Fifteen HBCVs were interviewed in three successive interviews. As the work progressed, I realised that there was a need to create the space for volunteers to talk about their work, their lives and themselves in ways that facilitated legitimacy and awareness of their identity. I will illustrate how my journey of realisation towards developing a legitimate voice as a researcher paralleled the women's realisation of a legitimacy of voice as home-based care volunteers and how our voices collectively contributed to the quality of the research. This subjective reflective position offers insight into the process of entering into respective communities of practice for the researcher and participants and the intersections between the two (NOY, 2003). [15]

3. Poetics and Space

3.1 Physical space and self-development

I wrote my first poems on a three-hour train journey from Stoke-on-Trent to London. I had just attended the 3rd International Narrative Practitioner Symposium where I first encountered narrative research, presented in creative forms. There were visual presentations, songs, short plays, videos and poems. On that trip, I wrote in my ever-present reflective field notebook, the beginnings of my first poems. Later I came across a poem reflecting on the "intergeneric world of poetry and inquiry" written on the Vancouver Island ferry (PRENDERGAST, 2001). This sparked the idea that space was implicated in the poetic process, especially in the case of research poetry. The physical space created by travelling and the train journey had manoeuvred me into a poetic space. My encounters with the creative representation of the narrative practitioners at the conference facilitated a cognitive space for poetic expression.

> "22/06/2009 to 24/06/2009
>
> Attended the 3rd Narrative Practitioners Conference
>
> Interesting how widely accepted and known narrative is here in the UK. It is easy to engage with researchers who understand the intricacies of narrative research. What I learned most profoundly here is how the findings, outcomes, understandings of narrative and indeed qualitative research can be presented in creative and different ways. In some instances they can only be presented legitimately in this way." [16]

Writing the poems served the purpose of situating emotions that were bubbling under the surface of my psyche waiting for a legitimate place. When I wrote the first research and reflective poems, I was merely mimicking what I had seen and heard at the conference. Through poetry I practiced autoethnographic reflection. There were many times in the process when I encountered new information, ideas or processes but did not really hear them until a space had been created for them. My doctoral supervisor suggested an article to read or area of literature that I should consider. Her suggestion did not resonate with me until days, weeks or months later when I was ready for the idea. The seed for this article was one of these suggestions. [17]

The association between my own process and the experiences of the home-based care volunteers in my study occurred to me whilst road-running, giving myself space outside of work and writing to explore a different aspect of myself and work on a different side of my life. I considered whether those home-based care volunteers had the task of self-development in conjunction with the new information they encountered to enable them to confidently express their ideas and intentions. Would their experiences include elements of self-doubt similar to my experience as an emerging researcher? The extract below documents my initial consideration for creating space within the interview process for interviewees to reflect more spontaneously and creatively about their work and lives.

"The interview had to be halted often for interpretation. This interfered with the flow of the interview and I felt placed an inordinate amount of control with the interviewer. This effect could be counteracted with an opportunity for the interviewee to give a more flowing account. Interpretation in this account could be for broad understanding and the interpreter would interrupt the interviewer far less often. The interviewer would at this stage make fewer clarifications other than those that have to do with the content of the life story and would make no attempt to make connections between ideas of uncover meaning.

As mentioned previously, connections could be explicitly elicited in a third follow-up interview."

Reflective field notes 14/05/2009 [18]

While interviews were being conducted, the issue of a physical space for HBCV work was in contention. A food garden that the group had planted to provide supplemental nutrition for their patients was under threat as it was in the space of another community group. They had not been allocated office space by the community as other groups had. Space to establish a care centre that had initially been offered free of charge was then reoffered at an unaffordable rate. The latter was a particularly important issue for this group of volunteers. Impressions of the women's interviews suggested that they perceived the claim to space to be beyond their capabilities. The HBCVs' conduct in the interviews suggested that they saw the issue of having a space of their own as important, but that they did not perceive their identity as HBCVs as sufficiently powerful to secure or demand such a space. [19]

Ensuing conversations with the HBCVs aimed to facilitate space for the exploration of identity in context. I hoped to arrive at an understanding of how the women made sense and meaning of their lives and work in what seemed to me to be intolerable physical conditions, lack of support and invisibility. I realised from my own experiences, that an enthusiastic audience who provided witness to the telling of one's own story contributed greatly to validation and affirmation of that story. The enthusiastic audience was an important element of establishing and acknowledging my own identity as a researcher, and I decided to act as a credible witness to the stories of the HBCVs. The group of HBCVs had discussed their work with other researchers previously so I added the life story and reflective interview to scaffold a connection between their work and their personal identity (WHITE, 2007). I adopted an attitude of seeing the HBCVs as experts in their own lives, listening in a non-judgemental and accepting way that encouraged HBCVs to reconnect parts of themselves (personal narratives) that they had not considered as important but were significant in the home-based care work (WEINGARTEN, 2003). I used a questioning style that served listening, promoted the development of alternative meanings, and which was non-judgemental and accepting (WHITE, 2007; WHITE & EPSTON, 1990). [20]

3.2 Dialogical space and identity construction

I was intrigued by how the construction of identity is a constant interplay of what is perceived as self-determined and the influences of audiences and context. Dialogue with my doctoral supervisor elevated my research and reflective process. In this relationship too, there was constant interplay between supervisor-student convention and the "academic rebellion" that I had to embark on to develop new frames and paths for exploration for myself as a researcher. In the poems below, I consider the issue of how context and audience shape performance and the performer's identity. This realisation is simultaneously liberating and oppressive. One is compelled to act within the boundaries of what is recognisable to others in order to be recognised as a person. However this compulsion can be stifling sometimes, perpetuating a dominant, tyrannical norm. This cycle of performativity is breached only through decisive rebellion in thoughts, words or action. Those who choose to enact this rebellion risk losing identity within contemporary and traditional frames, when they venture to explore or assert new possibilities for identity. Yet, even in this rebellion, the other, whether real or imagined, is still essential for dialogical impetus to witness, corroborate and support the emergence of new frames. The dialogical self, contesting the idea of identity as a fixed duality, is conceived of as socialised, historical, cultural, embodied and decentralised (HERMANS, 2003).

> ***Sawubona* means "I see you"**
>
> *Sawubona*
>
> Yebo, *Sawubona*
>
> Ninjani
>
> Ngikhona[1]
>
> I see you
>
> Yes, I see you (two)
>
> How are you?
>
> I am here
>
> You see me
>
> So, I am here
>
> I see you
>
> So you are here
>
> Salutations, breathed on the wind
>
> Condense, on touching ear, mind and spirit
>
> Sound-shifting across familiar melodies
>
> Abiding ancient rhythms
>
> Voices draped perilously on the breeze
>
> Plucked by deft thoughts
>
> Woven into colourful exchange

---

1 First four lines of the poem are a greeting in isiZulu translated into English in the second four lines.

Lacing round communal yarns

Conversation settles on unsteady wings

Vivid ideas take flight,

In the air amid minds

Connecting past and present people

Spin-storying over time(s)

Performing tentative designs

Skilful sewing fashioning ties

Stitching the banner of "I" [21]

As I became more captivated by research poetry, I became more daring about how I used it. I started to write what I call "transitional poems". These poems occupy a space between traditional presentation of research data and poetic representation. I would classify this type of poetry as consistent with PIIRTO's (2002, p.434) description of "poetry that has no issue of quality or qualification in the exercise, or in the execution. It is simply a means of alternative expression and alternative seeing". Writing the transitional poems quelled my anxiety about writing "perfect poetry" that fulfilled poetic criteria whilst allowing me to harness some crucial reflective ideas before they dematerialised. Moreover transitional poems allowed me to bridge the space between the emotional and the cognitive. In order to convey the emotional ideas inherent in the data without sacrificing poignancy, I could safely indulge in the transitional poem where I could engage with data, a reflective idea or with the relevant emotion of a poem first. Transitional poems facilitate dialogical reflection and promote critical agency. The transitional poem below is one that developed towards the poem above. Here I was grappling with the notion of collectivist aspects of identity. As we strive to be seen, recognised and acknowledged as a right of our existence in the social world, there is the implicit responsibility of reciprocity in this recognition.

To be a person in this world you must ...

To be a person in this world you must

See others

Others must see you

To be a person in this world you must

Sing others' songs

Others must sing your songs

To be a person in this world you must

Dance others' dances

Others must dance your dance

To be a person in this world you must

Hear others' voices

Others must hear your voice

To be a person in this world you must

See(k)

Sing

Dance ...

Listen [22]

Notably, the African philosophical concept of *ubuntu* commonly articulated in the isiZulu phrase *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person because of people) corresponds here, reinforcing the idea that every aspect of human identity is always defined relative to the identity of other human beings. To authentically inhabit an identity it is almost imperative that one is witnessed and acknowledged in one's performance of that identity. According to WEINGARTEN (2003), witnessing includes the element of remembering. If someone witnesses another by remembering qualities or aspects of their lives that they have neglected, but which have bearing on current circumstances, that witnessing will produce a greater sense of wholeness in the other then previously held. Witnessing also incorporates non-judgemental, accepting listening and questions that serve and promote the development of alternative meanings (WEINGARTEN, 2003; WHITE, 2007). [23]

4. Witnessing

4.1 Witnessing as a qualitative researcher

Witnessing is a natural consequence of using qualitative methods that require the direct presence of the researcher in the process of research (STEIN & MANKOWSKI, 2004). In working with marginalised groups, qualitative researchers are often among the few to witness the study participants as informants. Witnessing and validation by others leads to a legitimate sense of self and a resonance with valid discourses or the self-confidence to challenge counterproductive discourses. Alternatively, qualitative researchers may help elicit prior experiences of being powerless, reveal unguarded narratives and reveal the workings of an oppressive system in their work with dominant groups. Witnessing can be transformative for both the researcher and the research participants in marginalised or dominant groups (STEIN & MANKOWSKI, 2004). [24]

In my conversations with the home-based care volunteers, I saw that my (and other researchers') witnessing offered a means for acknowledgement and affirmation of their work. At a practical level, the home-based care volunteers recognised the witnessing aspect of interviewing as a method for drawing attention to their needs and a way of gaining material resources.

"Asanda[2]: It's helpful to talk, it helps because sometimes we do what we do and we don't know what other people think about it, so if there is a possibility that someone will hear about it and do something to what we do and how we do it. And also just to have someone to listen even though they are not going to do anything or help you in anyway but just listening. Sometimes we are out there and we start doubting what we

2 Pseudonym of a 53 year-old home-based care volunteer with over ten years of experience.

do, ask ourselves is it relevant is it contributing towards anything and we are
sometimes not really sure." [25]

Being witnessed and acknowledged offered catharsis and inspiration to continue
with the work.

"Asanda: It felt like I had gained something even though I did not have anything
tangible. It felt like a big weight had been lifted off my shoulders. ... Talking helps and
it makes me not sit and not do anything, but it makes me work even harder and move
on from that. ... Sometimes when you really need to talk you might have to call
someone who is not so close by to you and that is limiting. But to have someone that
you don't know who is interested in listening to what you have to say, you can say and
talk about anything and that makes me … it makes me feel good.

Research ap(plea)cation

Represent me as

I represent you

Stand up for my rights

Go where I cannot

Speak for me

Make them hear my voice

Represent [26]

In the poem above, I considered my responsibility as a researcher to authentically
represent the voices of the participants in research output. In fact, as my voice as
researcher became stronger there was the risk that it would obscure the
participants' voices in my representation of them. The process of acquiring a
legitimate researcher identity involved my having to make various applications to
funders and review boards for funding and ethical clearance of the study. I
questioned how this process moved me further from the essence of what the
participants had to say and how I would represent it. Standardised data
representation methods distance or alienate the researcher from the voices of
participants and how their words, thoughts and feelings are represented,
particularly if the participants belong to disempowered or marginalised groups.
Very few research participants are able to genuinely understand research reports
or publications about the results of studies in which they participated. STEIN and
MANKOWSKI (2004, p.22) submit that part of the assumption that qualitative
research serves is to reveal or amplify the voices of participants and this should
be incorporated in what these authors refer to as "the act of knowing". The word
"plea" embedded within the word "application" in the poem's title alludes to the
participants' implicit or tacit appeal to be authentically represented in the research
process. The researcher's ethical obligation is to create publicly accessible
representations of knowledge gained by conducting qualitative research. They
embody researchers' understandings about the social contexts and lives of
research participants and can be represented through various activities, e.g.
writing, teaching, speaking, organising, depending on research and action goals.

Poetry represents a valid example of the "act of knowing" in qualitative research. This is particularly apt because research poetry represents a resistance to academic prose and offers the opportunity for people to simultaneously connect with the content, context and emotional connotation of the research, mediated by the researcher/poet's reflective voice. The latter is significant in that it is possible for the researcher's voice to be manifestly evident in poetry contrary to positivist academic prose where it is often the researcher/writer's aim to eliminate subjectivity from writing. [27]

4.2 Witnessing: Validation of self and other through dialogue and authentic representation

In the initial stages of my work I constantly doubted, at a "rational" level, the legitimacy of the research methods that I was drawn to and which were, on a viscerally level, meaningful to me. (The intuitive attraction to the creative aspects of the work and the assurance from my doctoral supervisor that this research direction was indeed legitimate and had many vociferous supporters ensured that I persisted despite doubts.) I began to realise that being part of the research community that heard and understood my voice gave me confidence to explore my ideas further and present them in more creative and authentically representative modes. A poem conveys this.

(Poet)ry B-rated

Of all the names I've called myself

Of all the selves I would've liked to be

A poet was not a role I thought I'd fill

A poetess less still

To be judged with those that scribble

In dog-eared, well-thumbed notebooks

With pencils past their prime

Was not a goal of mine

Scratching sentiments of love won and lost

Extolling virtues of those dead and past

Sprouting language in bursts of fire

Was not the course of my desire

Then bewitchingly, sleight of word

Entranced this stolid mind

Materialising magical refrain

Past logic's dense domain

Scratchings not works of literary merit

Tethered thoughts unfetter

Finding in poetic identity

A peaceful synchronicity [28]

In considering the legitimacy of my voice as a researcher, I shared common ground with the HBCVs. I had embarked on work that was personally significant and meaningful to me but I constantly doubted myself and adhered to superficial exploration of the work and my own perception until I experienced validation from like-minded researchers, my doctoral supervisor and the acknowledgement of my work in an academic journal. The HBCVs had also embarked on work that was necessary and personally significant whilst striving for legitimacy of voice as a group. Their voice and interests were not supported by larger social and political discourses and structures but gained some ground through the interest shown by researchers like myself, their patients and community members. [29]

Poetic representation creates the space for alternate expressions of life along with the opportunities for critical attention to knowledge claims about them (RICHARDSON, 2002). As I struggled with my right to represent the women's voices, poetic expression redeemed me through its very form and style. The necessary silences, spaces, implication and impression of the poetic form created a respite between the women's voices and my representation of their voices in which I hoped an audience could relate to the material through the vantage point of a personal repository of experience. In this way, it seemed to be a more respectful, authentic and genuine means of representation. [30]

Projecting voice, making the personal political and the political personal performance ethnography, of which poetic reflection is a form, offers more than a tool of liberation. It is a way of being moral and political in the world and represents striving for an ethical position and authenticity in research (DENZIN, 2003; STEIN & MANKOWSKI, 2004). Performance ethnography represents a form of action research in that it is a triple process of doing, thinking and being. Action research combines the process of developing theory and practice through making creative connections and playing with interactions between emerging concepts and different arts-based media generally, and poetry in particular (ELLIOT, 2009). Poetry writing as a form of enquiry knowing can be used as a medium to make conceptual breakthroughs in writing action research and as a means to reflect on and distil writing experience (BARRETT, 2011; RICHARDSON & ADAMS-ST. PIERRE, 2008). The concept of civic participation is redefined within the spaces of this new performative, cultural politics and radical democratic imagination, transforming the personal into the political.

> **Writing space writing self**
>
> In my space, I write
>
> My space writes me
>
> With my words, I speak
>
> My words speak me
>
> Hearing my words,
>
> You hear me
>
> Knowing that
>
> You hear my words

I become me

"I write what I like"[3]

I write what I am

I write what I will be

I write me [31]

HILEY (2006, p.561) proposed that there has been a "great silencing" of poetic voice such that we are less likely to acknowledge the everyday, practical value in realising that reflective practice and poetic expression are linked, and that expressing our "selves" in texts animates our words and actions. I questioned whether my identity as a woman from a marginalised group affected my ability to believe confidently in my own voice as a researcher. In all dealings with the world, women must take an apologetic stance for success and sacrifice other aspects of their lives to achieve it. Sometimes, they must even make excuses for why they want to achieve or ask permission for participating in worldly activities that do not pertain to supporting their own homes and families. Even in the absence of discernible external criticism, internalised self-criticism is present, fostered by generations of defined gender roles and the real and imagined transgressions and consequences thereof. My own experience of finding space in my life and from my family and my full-time work as a therapist to do my doctoral research is resonant in this. Even as I wrote this I questioned my own pretentiousness in assuming this position. Do I have the right to say this out loud, present it in academic article?

Tacit tyranny

Someone said "To be born a woman is a curse"

Not me … being a woman means

You never have to think, who you should be.

That's luck!

No chance of losing the key to your identity

You don't even have to hold on to it.

Just ask

Your ask parents, man, children

If that fails

Don't panic

There are a hundred others

Willing to say

Where you should go,

What you should do

Who to be

Be warned ...

---

3   From South African black consciousness leader Steve BIKO's writing about claiming identity
    from fear, oppression and denial (BIKO, 1978).

There are those who will ask

Who is she? Who does she think she is?

Remain calm,

They will move, ahead of your response

Don't try to be yourself or someone else

There's no way you'll succeed

Enquire, confer, consult, apply ...

Just don't think for yourself

Thinking, you could change the world

Change what is important, Alter the rules

What will happen then?

How will you deal with that? [32]

What happens if one is silent? One is insidiously deflated, like the air escaping from a balloon in a slow almost imperceptible leak.

Silence?

Silent summer sun

sliding slow,

stealthy, somnolent.

Seeing secret schemes

searching soundless sights

surveying sinister spectacles.

Suppose such scenes

showed signs

strange, serious, scary ...

Should YOU, staring,

sympathise? [33]

Every real poem is the breaking of an existing silence. The question to ask of any poem is "what kind of voice is breaking silence, and what kind of silence is being broken?" (RICH, 2001, p.150). In the poem above, I question: What happens when good people are silent? I thought about this on a visit to the Apartheid Museum in South Africa. The South African governments, both old and new, have each been defined by and guilty of two major and deafening silences: The former against ignored voices of the people opposing Apartheid and the latter ignored the voices of the people asking for HIV and AIDS treatment and that HIV and AIDS be acknowledged as real conditions (FOURIE, 2006). Poetic reflection offers a medium through which the practitioner can represent an experience as well as the reactions and interpretations of it (WILLIS, 1999): "Self-reflexivity unmasks complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing" (RICHARDSON & ADAMS-ST. PIERRE, 2008. p.475). [34]

The women's actions through volunteering as caregivers speak out against the silences represented by a lack of care-giving resources for people afflicted with HIV and AIDS. However, in breaking the silence, they risk sanction for transgressing boundaries. To speak up and deny silence requires courage, strength and hope. In performing home-based care work, the HBCVs act on the silences about how people living with HIV and AIDS should be cared for and supported. Their resistance through the performance of care is both personal and political. In talking to the women, I aimed to clear a space for reflection on action. I hoped the women would reflect on their work and themselves and move towards imaginative possibilities, for understanding their work and lives. Poetic reflection facilitated my imagination. "Performance autoethnography dialogically introduces itself into the world aspiring to social change through stimulating conflict, curiosity, criticism and reflection and promoting meticulous 'ethical grounding' in a commitment to combat racial, sexual and class discrimination" (DENZIN, 2003, p.261). Found poetry in the voice of one of the participants illustrates self-reflection, reflection on action, dialogical reflection and the validation and affirmation of identity inherent in the acknowledgement of one by another (PRENDERGAST, 2009).

I think that through ...

I went back I started thinking

It makes me work even harder

It inspires me to do even more.

Sometimes I feel like I am not doing well

But talking helps

It makes me feel happy to be able to talk

I realised that in talking

You could blame yourself

And forgive yourself

And then move on from that.

It does help a lot to talk.

But, to have someone

Who is interested in listening,

That makes me ...

It makes me feel ...

Good [35]

The "found" poem above encapsulates the women's response in essence. Understanding self and other can be attained through a reflective, creative process that circumvents a traditional social science representational methodology. It is person-centred and requires that the researcher engages with the personal world of the self and others. Poetic reflection and interpretation allowed me to realise that the use of poetry could be helpful in understanding the

life experiences of research participants and myself (as a researcher) and arrive
at new realisations. This final Haiku conveys that.

Reflective alliance

A drop of oil floats

On a puddle in sunlight

Iridesen(s)es! [36]

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