

# Chapter 17

## Language, Emotions, and Access to Refugee Women: Ingredients for Reflexivity



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### 1 Introduction

This chapter is drawn from a study conducted within the scope of the doctoral project carried out by the first author and supervised by the second author. This study had the main goal of understanding the process of becoming a refugee woman from a criminological and gender perspective. Particularly, the purpose was to access refugee women's narratives to validate their experiences of violence and agency as a direct source of knowledge in three stages, as well as in geographical and symbolic places: in their country of origin, during the displacement journey; and in their country of asylum.

The refugee women were recruited from Portugal, the country where they applied for international protection. Instead of looking for refugee women in the community, by placing an advertisement in local newspapers or through online advertisements for research subjects, the participants were sought out with the help of professionals from different institutions and other national entities involved in the Portuguese asylum system. The sample selection followed four criteria, namely, the women were 18 years of age or older; they had received the Portuguese asylum system protection, either as asylum seekers or as refugees; they arrived in Portugal during the last European crisis of refugees; and they understood and spoke Portuguese or English, or, if not, agreed to the presence of a translator during the interviews.

From the 24 women recruited, 14 women were from the Middle East, 11 from Syria and three women from Iraq. The other ten women were from Africa, namely,

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three from Angola, two from Congo, one from Togo, one from Sudan, one from Somalia, one from Gambia, and one from Morocco. The ages of the women interviewed ranged from a minimum of 21 years old to a maximum of 48 years old. Regarding their arrival, the average number of years that these women have been living in Portugal varied from 6 months to 2 years.

The study was conducted through the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews. The COVID-19 pandemics had a significant impact on this study because it overlapped with the data collection phase. For that reason, only five interviews were conducted face-to-face in the programmed schedule, in February of 2020. The remaining 19 were only possible to be rescheduled for the beginning of 2021, and were conducted online using the *Zoom* platform, due to the COVID-19 contention measures, such as social distance, lockdown, and curfews.

According to Probst (2015, pp. 39) “*criteria for qualitative rigor tend to emphasize the relational aspects of knowledge construction, including transparency, reciprocity, and critical self-reflection.*” Nonetheless, Gringeri et al. (2013) pointed to a surprising absence of reflexive practice and reflexive accounts in the published investigations of most of the researchers. With this in mind, the current chapter will stress the importance of being self-aware and reflexive about the researcher’s own role in the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data.

Following a constructivist approach, in the next sections, the authors will showcase how trustworthiness is possible to achieve through the right balance of reflexivity and subjectivity that allows the researcher to consider the data collected and the reflections that such data were subjected to; the negotiations between the various subjects involved in the investigation process; and the performance of the researcher and its relationship with the participants.

## **2 The Importance of Reflexivity in Creating Scientific Knowledge**

While designing and conducting the abovementioned study, the authors of this chapter were confronted with questioning some aspects of epistemology, that is, the status and characteristics of scientific knowledge. These questions correspond, first and foremost, to those involved in any research using qualitative methodologies, but also, in particular, to those resulting from the application of data collection techniques that require a more intimate relationship between the researcher and the participants.

Overall, validity, reliability, and objectivity are well-accepted criteria in the positivistic epistemological approach to most of quantitative empirical research and are considered to be achieved through the suppression of any subjective interpretations and arguments in the production of knowledge (Imai, 2017). However, if the researcher develops qualitative research based on a constructivist approach, validity, reliability, and objectivity are considered not to be satisfactory for establishing

trustworthiness (Chandra & Shag, 2017). The core of trustworthiness can be described as the means by which qualitative researchers ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are evident in research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). According to Williams and Morrow (2009, pp. 577), there are three main categories of trustworthiness that qualitative researchers should strive to obtain: integrity of data, balance between reflexivity and subjectivity, and clear communication of findings.

Focusing on the authors' second category, "*balance between reflexivity and subjectivity*" (2009, pp. 577), the criticisms directed at the problem of subjectivity in qualitative investigations are not limited to the type of data used and the results obtained but extended to the ways in which "objective" knowledge is conceived (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In general terms, for most positivistic approaches, objectivity refers to the neutrality of knowledge, to knowledge free of any subjective interference. Accordingly, neutral knowledge depends fundamentally on the way knowledge about reality takes place, thus concluding that without this neutrality there is no objectivity and, therefore, knowledge produced in these conditions lacks scientific validity (Imai, 2017).

On the other hand, the constructivist assumption is that knowledge is socially constructed—a product of subjectivity—generated from the relationship between the subject that knows and the corresponding object that is known—a relationship that is historically, socially, and subjectively situated (Chafetz, 2006). Mann (2016, pp.28) describes reflexivity as being created precisely in this intersection because reflexivity is "(...) *focused on the self and ongoing intersubjectivities. It recognizes mutual shaping, reciprocity, and bi-directionality, and that interaction is context-dependent and context renewing.*" Likewise, for Attia and Edge (2017, pp. 33), reflexivity "(...) *involves a process of ongoing mutual shaping between researcher and research.*" Edge (2011) further characterized reflexivity as encompassing two interacting elements: prospective reflexivity, regarding the effect of the whole-person-researcher on the research, and retrospective reflexivity, related to the impact of the research on the researcher.

*Reflexivity also plays an important role regarding research's ethical issues.*

The study presented here gained the approval of a research ethics committee from the Faculty of law and criminology of the University of Porto. This was a fundamental step to take before the data collection. Still, ethical research is much more than research that has gained a research ethics committee approval. Reflexivity is closely linked to the ethical practice of research and can be particularly useful in the work field where research ethics committees are not available (Attia & Edger, 2017). According to McGraw et al. (2000, pp. 68), reflexivity is "(...) *a process whereby researchers place themselves and their practices under scrutiny, acknowledging the ethical dilemmas that permeate the research process and impinge on the creation of knowledge.*" Consequently, in conducting qualitative research, a researcher that is reflexive will be in a better condition to be aware of the ethically significant moments as they arise and will have a foundation for answering in a way

that is likely to be ethically appropriate even in unexpected circumstances (Cowburn, et al., 2017; Berger, 2016).

In conclusion, reflexivity should be considered and promulgated as a way of ensuring not only rigorous research practices but also ethical research practices. Following the constructivist approach that considers knowledge as nonneutral, believing that trustworthiness is possible to achieve in qualitative research through the right balance of reflexivity and subjectivity, as stressed by Williams and Morrow (2009), the next section will demonstrate how the authors of this chapter actively pursued such balance throughout the study on the process of becoming a refugee woman.

### **3 Methodological Challenges: Evaluating Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research**

The present research adopts the perspective advanced by Harding (2015) to maximize the objectivity of a knowledge that is assumed to be partial and situated, and which is based on strong reflexivity (Berger, 2015). For Harding (2015), no knowledge is built without containing the marks that reveal its production process, that is, the researcher's personal, social, and political interests and position. And the circumstances conditioning knowledge can also condition researchers and projects. According to feminist standpoint theorists, knowledge is a product of the time and place from which it is produced, which has several implications as to the way knowledge is conceived in general, and to the problem of its objectivity. The product of knowledge is, therefore, collective, generated by the diverse experiences involved in this epistemological relationship (Attia & Edge, 2017).

The study presented in this chapter is more in alignment with feminist perspectives according to which knowledge is situated and partial. To criticize knowledge, as well as the subject that produces it, strong reflexivity that goes through the whole design of the research is needed: from the selection of the problem, through all phases of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Although this program of reflexivity is an exercise in maximizing objectivity, Berger (2015) concludes that there is no single way of conceptualizing it. Therefore, even if the researcher tries to minimize the impact of the researcher/researched relationship on the data collection process, this impact will still exist, and the data are therefore always an interaction product. With that in mind, feminist perspectives encourage the focus on the social positioning of participants as a way to maximize the objectivity of the research.

Considering the lessons learned in the course of the study presented in this chapter, the next four subsections will provide examples of how to become a reflexive researcher by exploring the methodological challenges faced by the first author during the fieldwork, namely, the use of translators during the conduction of interviews; the emotional impact of the research on the researcher; the relationship

between the researcher and the research; and the ordeals of collecting data during lockdowns/a global pandemic.

### ***3.1 The Use of Translators During the Conduction of Interviews***

In the study conducted, there was a wide variety of nationalities of participants and some of them were unable to communicate either in Portuguese or English. To overcome that limitation, two translators were used in the conduction of 13 interviews: one French translator for three interviews, and one Arabic translator for ten interviews. Language barriers were preconsidered when designing the study and have been presented in methods' literature. Still, some initial concerns existed both regarding a translator bias, as well as the regional and cultural diversity of the refugee women interviewed. There was, thus, a risk of jeopardizing accuracy and meaningfulness of the data reported. In fact, the existing body of literature has identified that translators in qualitative research play a decisive part in terms of maintaining the integrity of meanings being conveyed in original data (Ho et al., 2019).

Because interpretation and meaning are core to qualitative research, it is natural for concerns about translation to emerge, namely the fact that translation is also an interpretative act, and therefore, original meanings may get lost in the process mediated by translators. It is, thus, crucial to foresee and prevent any additional challenges created by differences in language that could hinder the transfer of meaning from participant to research, or that could cause the loss of the meanings and compromise the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. In this regard, Squires (2009) synthesizes methodological recommendations into a list of criteria used to evaluate how researchers deal with translators and interpreters in their qualitative studies. Such criteria were, then, carefully tested and used during the research process to evaluate the impact of translators on data collection and analysis. This improved the reflexivity process and allowed the authors to fulfill the aim of being reflexive researchers, as showcased next.

According to Squires (2009, p. 279), to accomplish conceptual equivalence, a researcher must have "*provided a rationale for why the analysis occurred in the chosen language, especially if it was not the same language as the participants.*" In that matter, the objectives of the study justify the need for the use of translators, because, while designing the mentioned study and looking at the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees worldwide, it was noticeable that most people come from Africa and the Middle Eastern regions. If the sample had been limited to speakers of the Portuguese language, the data collection would have lost its richness and variety.

Likewise, the researcher must have "*developed a translation lexicon for multi-language studies to ensure conceptual equivalence*" (Squires, 2009). In the study, terms such as "rape," "sexual assault," "forced marriage," "abuse," and such, were

translated into Portuguese, French, and Arabic using words in those languages that had the same meaning, to establish a lexicon suitable for the current research.

Lastly, the research should have *“had the translation validated by a qualified bilingual individual not directly involved with data collection or the initial translation”* (Squires, 2009). The interview script was first written in Portuguese and then translated to English, French, and Arabic, and all of the translations were verified, in terms of sentence formulation and the concepts used, by natural speakers of those same languages who were not directly involved in the research project.

In relation to the translator credentials, Squires (2009, p. 280) suggests that the researcher must have *“briefly described the translator’s qualifications or previous experience with translation.”* Both translators who participated in the study had previously work on scientific research that involved similarly vulnerable participants and therefore were considered well prepared. Nonetheless, prior to their participation in the interviews, a meeting was held between the researcher and the two translators separately, to explain the intended meaning and its context in the source language used in the interview guide. This was done in a side-by-side procedure, in which the researcher and the translator discussed possible wordings. Furthermore, the researcher needs to have *“described the researcher’s level of language competence”* (Ibidem). The translator of the Arabic language was a natural speaker of the language since she was born in Palestine. The translator of the French language was born in France and completed primary school in that country, before moving to Portugal. She also had French classes at the faculty and spoke French fluently.

Finally, the researcher must *“describe the researchers or translators’ identity in contrast to that of the participants”* (Ibidem). Both translators were female, which was one of the criteria for their selection because the sample of refugees were all females and, due to the sensitivity and vulnerability related to their status of refugees, it was considered more appropriate to have only women participating in the conduction of the interviews.

On the translator’s role, Squires (2009, p. 280) emphasized the researchers’ duty to *“describe the translator’s role in the study.”* In the study, both translators participated as intermediates of the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee: they translated the question in the language of the interviewee and then translated the answer into Portuguese, in the case of French translator; and into English, in the case of the Arabic translator.

The researcher should also have *“described at what point(s) during the research process they used translation services”* (Squires, 2009). The translation services were used prior to the conduction of the interviews, to check if the interview script was properly translated; during the interviews, the translators asked the questions and to report the answers; and in the transcription phase of the interviews and in the validation of the transcriptions’ content. The validation of the interviewer’s content was used in relation to the conducted in Arabic. This happened because the answers of the interviewees were translated into English first, which is neither the natural language of the translator nor the researcher. Therefore, after the transcription of the interviews, the researcher sent those transcriptions to the translator, who listened to

the interviews and double-checks the information translated to see if it matched with what was said by the interviewees during the conduction of the interviews.

Equally, the researcher must have “*identified who conducted the analysis and in what language it took place*” (Squires, 2009). The analysis of the data collected was conducted by the researchers, and that analysis was made both in Portuguese, for the cases of the interviews transcribed in Portuguese, and in English, for the interviews that were translated into English.

Regarding considerations for different qualitative approaches to avoid translation disruptions of the fluid research process, Squires (2009, p. 281) highlighted that the researcher must have “*selected the appropriate research method for the cross-language qualitative study.*” Due to the fact that the study in question required the participation of two translators, and given the vulnerability of the participants, the in-depth semi-structured interview was considered to be the most appropriate method to conduct the investigation.

Still, the research should have “*pilot tested the translated interview guide prior to conducting the study*” (Squires, 2009). The interview scripts in French and in Arabic were tested with two native speakers of the French and Arabic languages, to see if the questions were properly translated and were understandable, clear, and logical.

Additionally, the researcher must have “*stated in the limitations section, or another appropriate location, that translation or use of translators may have affected the results*” (Ibidem). In the field, language barriers were quite difficult to digest, and it became frustrating for the first author (being the interviewer) to not be able to ask questions or understand the answers given by the subjects. Thus, the first author felt unable to fully control the interviews and had to learn how to delegate and share the conduction of the interviews with someone else—which was somehow hard to accept. Simultaneously, she felt that, while she completely trusted the translators chosen, she could never be totally reassured that questions and answers were being translated exactly as they were presented.

Nonetheless, as the interviews were carried out, it became evident the fundamental role of the translators in establishing a trusting relationship between the first author and the participants since the translators left the women comfortable and willing to share their stories. Although the interviews conducted without the presence of translators lasted longer, this did not compromise the amount of data collected, as it was possible to ask, more or less, the same questions. Nonetheless, that is a possibility that must be recognized and planned for, when conducting qualitative research though the use of translators.

As a practical challenge, it can be shared that the first author’s ability to concentrate during the interviews was greatly diminished because there were many “still” moments of listening to the conversation between translator and interviewee, where she was not able to understand what was being said. In order to overcome this, she started to record in a notebook the behavior manners of the interviews, their tones of voices, body postures, and such, which allowed her to stay “present” and to gather secondary information that was very useful for data analysis. In fact, comparing the collection of this type of intel in the interviews with the presence of

translators and with the ones conducted only by the first author, it is possible to conclude that, in the former, this type of intel was richer than in the latter.

Furthermore, the mediation via the translators made it more difficult to establish empathy and rapport with participants than in the interviews conducted only by the first author, due to the time gap between the subjects' responses and the translation that followed. It becomes very hard to convey understanding, active listening or compassion with the interviewees' narratives when one does not fully understand what is being said, especially considering the participants were retelling victimization episodes and potentially traumatic experiences.

The first author was able to establish empathy and rapport with the refugee women by returning to the more sensitive subjects conveyed to her by the translators and by making some comforting comments to the participants, not only using words, but also with gestures, that showcase her solidarity and admiration for the heartbreaking experiences faced by the women interviewed. In this way, the first author hoped to show she was not there only to capture information but also to establish a trusting, sympathetic, understanding relationship with the participants. However, this last aspect should be considered as a warning to fellow researchers who find themselves in the same situation, and further studies are needed that explore and evaluate how the data collection and data analysis can be impacted upon by the ways in which the researchers address the challenges of cross-language qualitative research.

Additionally, debating the first author's own frustrations and insecurities with the second author of this chapter improved her critical thinking and self-awareness regarding her own posture and oral communication skills. Besides, reaching out to other fellow researchers who had already performed interviews with translators or had assumed the position of translators themselves, gave the first author a greater insight into others' perceptions of translators, which increased her research experience, information processing, as well as her positive attitudes in relation to the conduction of the interviews.

### ***3.2 The Emotional Impact of Research on the Researcher***

Qualitative research often involves a consideration of the impact of the feelings, views, attitudes, and values that the participants hold to have on the data collection and the data analysis. Such consideration has traditionally been developed from a methodological perspective on a more pragmatic level, that is, how they affect the researcher studying sensitive and emotional topics such as victims of crime, marginalized groups, and criminals (Pio & Singh, 2016). While reflecting on the impact of conducting this study, two main aspects were identified: the emotional impact created by the sensitive topics being explored, and the challenges faced when trying to respect and honor the marginalized and often silenced refugee women. All this, while simultaneously trying to balance the power disparities that usually exist between the researcher and the participants, as was the case for this study, since the



researchers were in a privileged position regarding the participants: both of the authors were Portuguese citizens with no similar personal experiences to the women being interviewed, who were in a very fragile situation, under the protection of the Portuguese State, as refugees, having escaped their home countries, having experienced several encounters of violence on the basis of race, class, and gender, and hoping on becoming Portuguese citizens one day.

Regarding emotional impact, the stories that the participants shared were often catastrophic and heartbreaking, with life paths scarred by episodes of relentless abandonment, repeated violence, and constant violation of their human rights, provoking emotions that strongly affected the first author, both during and after the interviews. Feelings of sadness upon the interviewees' narratives of violence were frequent, and sometimes let the first author to hold back from crying during the interviews. Indeed, listening to the stories of the refugee women led to the development of feelings of sorrow and distress for their personal experiences, which created a sense of discomfort and nausea that stayed with the first author, even after the interviews were finished.

The first author often resorted to the second author's and colleagues' support, as well as to her closest friends, who were key players in helping her digest and overcome feelings of powerlessness that she felt in relation to her incapability to help the interviewees in a more practical way. Indeed, they reassured her that, although she could not assist the refugee women interviewed in housing, health, and school matters, the study that she was developing would provide a significant contribution to the scientific knowledge in the field of criminological, gender, and migration studies on refugee women.

Simultaneously, the participants' narratives of agency, a concept that has been used in reference to their decision-making and action-taking in their cultural contexts (Kanal & Rottmann, 2021), their strength, determination, capacity to overcome hardships, created in the first author strong motivation and willingness to continue on the scientific journey. Indeed, she hoped to demonstrate the potential contributions of refugee women to the societies that welcome them, and more broadly, to the so often lost notions of humanity, human rights, kindness, and equality.

The first author's feelings of empathy demanded a constant process of refocusing because she wanted to prevent her emotional closeness with the participants from having an impact on her right, as a researcher, to interpret and represent data (Ashby, 2011). It was understood that a safe emotional distance from the experiences of the participants was necessary to maintain an objective glance about the research itself, keeping in mind the ethical dilemmas of power and ownership. Doing otherwise would fail in representing the real voices of participants in interviews and would potentially "*reinforce the very systems of oppression it seeks to address.*" (Ashby, 2011, p. 11). But an emotional connection with the participants was also crucial to let them feel comfortable and willing to share their personal stories. This meant allowing for subjectivity bonding to be built between the first author and the interviewees conveyed through smiles, light touch in their hands, complements to their

appearance, and the use of sentences such as “I see,” “I understand it,” “yes,” and “I can only imagine what you went through.”

In the online interviews, the refugee women were at their homes, which were provided to them by the Portuguese state. In those cases, the first author also gave compliments on their houses, and acknowledged when the women presented complaints regarding their accommodations. Likewise, she was also receptive when the women introduced her to their kids. Indeed, the more relaxed moments where the participants showed their homes and their children were very important in establishing a trustworthy relationship between them and the first author, which favored the process of collecting data. For the record, the kids were not present during the conduction of the interviews, because they were either there at the beginning of the interview and then left, or they arrived at the end.

Another very important element for the mental well-being of the first author was the use of a journal. To actively develop the process of reflexivity, it is necessary to adopt methods for attaining a reflexive stance such as “*keeping reflexive diaries, writing ourselves into field notes, recording analytic and methodological decisions in memos, and being reflexive about every decision we make*” (Barry et al., 1990, p.31). Reflexive notes regarding every single interview were recorded, describing all sorts of things, from the setting to other aspects that were noted both during the interview but also during the transcription and analysis.

It must also be stressed that the first author actually identified with the refugee women, not only due to also being a woman herself and being closer in age with almost every woman interviewed but as well because of the empathy and rapport that she established with them. The authors also acknowledge that the participants’ narratives would have lost their meaning and interpretability without the emotional responses that were present both in the interviewees and in the first author. The first author was quite conscious of her privileged position as a European, white, well-educated middle-class woman. Curiously, this led her to feel less, than more powerful, toward the participants. In fact, the notions of power and privilege can emerge linked to the social injustice and inequality quite often felt by the researcher when researching minority groups (Milner, 2007).

Critically reflecting upon their roles as a researcher in relation to the refugee women, the authors adopted a reflexive posture toward their own potential power to bring self-awareness about their positionality in relation to these women. By constantly reminding themselves of their own identity and role in the research project, they were also able to develop feelings of admiration, respect, and gratitude toward the women interviewed.

As a final note, the authors would also like to highlight the lack of a protocol provided by the ethics committee on how to manage the emotional impact generated by the research on Ph.D. students. Being so “green” to scientific research, the authors felt that it would be crucial for Ph.D. students that the ethics committee’s role extended from approving Ph.D. projects to a more supportive, collaborative, and helpful role, by providing advice and guidelines to students, and even if needed, psychological assistance.

### 3.3 *The Relationship Between Researcher and the Refugee Women Interviewed*

This study followed Attia and Edges' criteria of the interconnection of three elements—trust, collaboration, and corroboration—to reflect on the impact of the relationship between the researcher and the participants in “*establishing measures of trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry*” (Attia & Edges, 2017, p. 38).

Creating trust between the researcher and the participants is essential to establish reliability for qualitative research with participants. Without it, data collection can become very difficult or even empty of relevant content. In other words, a solid base of reliance between the researcher and the participants is more likely to generate accurate and trustworthy data (Maxwell, 2013). Through a careful reflection of the interactive and dynamic relationship between researcher and participant, including particular interests, perspectives, and surroundings, it is possible to recognize and work on the subjectivity involved in conducting qualitative research. In research, trust is constructed and endured through various forms, such as developing relationships and sharing a track record that demonstrates liability, common interests, and consideration for the best interests of others (Austin & Sutton, 2014).

In the mentioned study, informant consent agreements were translated into English, Arabic, and French, that is, into the languages known by the participants. The refugee women were asked if the documents were written properly before they signed them, with no major errors being reported. The agreement also contained a Portuguese version with the same information content for the ethics committee to be able to validate them. Verbal consent during the interviews was also asked for so it could be kept on record. Participants' privacy and anonymity, as well as confidentiality, were meticulously explained and guaranteed through encrypting computer-based files, storing documents (signed consent forms) in a locked file cabinet, and removing personal identifiers (such as their names) from study documents as soon as possible.

However, according to Anderson and Edwards (2010), this whole process is perhaps unsatisfactory for constructing trust and should be considered a small effort toward that objective. Therefore, the first author tried to achieve the participants' trust, at the time of presenting the research to the refugee women, by not only explaining the topic and objectives to them but also by explaining her personal motives for engaging in the research. Indeed, she told the refugee women, briefly, about her academic background in criminology and in violence against women and children, as well as her personal conviction that refugee women's accounts regarding their own experiences of violence, marginalization, and segregation, are a powerful tool to achieve the proper knowledge on that matter and to make a contribution to change.

The term collaboration in academic research is usually thought to mean an equal partnership between the researcher and the participants, which implicates the creation of real communication and partnerships, which are pursuing mutually interesting and beneficial research (Bansal et al., 2019). Collaboration places the researcher

and the participants in the same category of respect and implies ethical conduct that preserves honesty, integrity, justice, transparency, and confidentiality (Korstjens, & Moser, 2018).

From the first contact with the participants, at the recruitment stage, until the actual moment of the interviews, the first author constantly reaffirmed the importance of this research and the impact that it could potentially have not only on the interviewees but also on others who may have experienced similar experiences, as well as the scientific and academic benefits of creating more knowledge about the process of becoming a refugee woman. The participants' understanding of the importance of the research is fundamental for promoting their willingness to participate in the research and to share deeply personal details that can be crucial to the posterior data analysis (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). And most of the women interviewed showcased their willingness to contribute, with their personal experiences, to the creation of best practices of reception and integration, not only for themselves but also for future refugee women. Some of them also reported that they would like to have a more active role in helping others, such as performing jobs at ONGs for refugees and such.

Additionally, the first author frequently applied the rules of thumb of interviews such as active listening, nodding and respecting silences, repeating sections of the narrative of participants, asking prompt and feedback questions, techniques usually adequate to deepen trust, empathy, and rapport, and to promote spontaneity and richer accounts from the interviewees. Furthermore, the first author also used some nontraditional ways to bond with the interviewees, such as sharing personal details of her life, her knowledge regarding trivial information regarding participants' home country, and even using humor to positively engage in the criticisms made by them to the Portuguese asylum system.

Regarding corroboration, the first author tried to corroborate the interpretations and meanings that she was attributing to the participants' discourses during the interviews, by frequently repeating the answers given by the participants, and by transparently sharing her understanding of those answers. Moreover, she always did her best to transmit a posture of naturalness, friendliness, and trust. Indeed, participants are more predisposed to share personal experiences and reply spontaneously to the questions being asked when they perceive the interviewer to be compassionate and engaged with their situation (Marks et al., 2018; Pfaff, & Markak, 2017), especially in the case of victims of all sorts of violence as was the case of a large part of the sample.

Particular attention was given to the dialogues and expressions used in order to ensure that the focus was on the participants' experiences. The feedback cycle was constantly carried out, by comparing the answers given by the participants and by adding topics of analysis that emerged from the interviews. This proved to be very useful to better understand the experience of becoming a refugee woman and the differences and similarities of the participants' perspectives on it. In fact, a feedback loop can enrich the data collected by providing a better understanding of the interviewees' perception and meaning attributed to situations or happenings (Schenke et al., 2017).

It is crucial for researchers to identify their responsibility in a project, and to guarantee a much-needed integrity to explore the interactions with the participants, with as little bias or personal considerations as possible. This is the only means to protect the up-and-coming, transmutative, and extremely scrutinized complexity of research (Attia & Edge, 2017). Nevertheless, to successfully collect more profound and rich data, the first author had to adopt a flexible role, steering when the interviewee drifted from the main question or shared personal experiences with little relevance to the research. Accordingly, when participants perceive the researcher as being fully engaged in the dialogue and storytelling taking place, then the information provided by the participants is more likely to be more powerful, deep, and detailed (Råheim et al., 2016).

Researchers must acknowledge and integrate their questions with discursive clues from the participants in their questions which allow them to be understood at a deeper level, i.e., personal experiences; points of view; prejudices; theoretical, political, and ideological attitudes; emotional responses, etc. (Korstjens, & Moser, 2018). Similarly, the first author always worked hard to capture the background and the worldviews of the participants. Likewise, she tried to adapt her speech in terms of language and the formulation of questions so her speech could be as comprehensible as possible for the participants, while, at the same time, following the most rigorous norms and methodological rigor, and respect for the participants.

### ***3.4 The Ordeals of Collecting Data During a Global Pandemic***

In March 2020, the OMS declared a pandemic due to the global spread of COVID-19. This caused unprecedented containment and sanitary measures worldwide, as well as unique opportunities and challenges for researchers conducting qualitative research, particularly because lockdowns and social distancing limited all sorts of face-to-face interaction and studies (Lobe et al., 2020). This was also the case for the mentioned study, mostly because between March 2020 and the beginning of 2021 it was not possible to conduct any face-to-face interviews. Lobe et al. (2020) stressed the importance of including reflections about the impact of COVID-19 in research conducted during the pandemics, considering both the impact it had upon themselves but also on the participants living through such uncertain times.

The authors of this chapter had to expand and reimagine methodological options for their study, and to search for alternative ways to collect data from participants. And although online methods in research are not new to scientific and academic research (Pang et al., 2018), special attention had to be given throughout the process, including adapting ethical procedures when transitioning research to online platforms (Lobe et al., 2020), such as ensuring the privacy of participant's identity and the confidentiality and security of data. Those concerns were also considered in Lobe et al.'s study (2020) who reviewed the latest videoconferencing services available to researchers and provided guidance on which services might best suit a project's needs.

Using the guidelines of these authors, the first concern regarding the privacy of participants' identity was safeguarded through a meticulous search of "(...) *the privacy, confidentiality, and data collection policies of all platforms and services.*" (Lobe et al., 2020, p. 5). Looking closely at the study of Archibald et al. (2019) on the feasibility and acceptability of using Zoom to collect qualitative interview data within a health research context, a decision was made to use this platform to conduct the online interviews. Zoom platform has the option to provide a password to access the meeting as well as a waiting room preventing nonauthorized people to access the ongoing meeting (Lobe et al., 2020).

Prior to the conduction of the interviews, online meetings with the participants and the translators (in the cases needed) were schedule to inform the refugee women about the technicalities involved, i.e., how to use the Zoom platform and its tools, and asked if they felt comfortable and safe enough to be part of the current research. The participants were also informed on the fact that all data (i.e., personal information, interview transcripts, researchers' personal notes) would be password protected in the researcher's personal computer and would not be shared or saved in online platforms. This was, obviously, a way to prevent any form of hacking or leaking of the data collected. As also suggested by Lobe et al. (2020), the recording of the interviews for research purposes was always made explicit in the verbal information given to participants, as well as in the informed consent. Participants were also informed that the audio recordings of the interviews would only be kept until their transcription and would be deleted after that and they were also reassured that they could withdraw from participating in the research if they wished to do so and that, subsequently, the image and sound recordings would be immediately deleted.

Furthermore, the potential presence of third parties who are not participants that may place the refugee women under any form of danger also needed to be considered and planned for. Likewise, during the first meetings, the importance of the participants to be alone during the interviews was stressed, but ultimately that decision was left in their hands so that the participants did not feel coerced or forced by the researcher to avoid revictimization or additional trauma (Surmiak, 2018). Nonetheless, as a safety measure, the first author agreed with the refugee women on a "safe word" that they would pronounce to let the researcher know that they were not able to continue the interview due to the interference of others. In that case, the interview would stop immediately. Another word was agreed on if the participants felt at risk in any way and needed the researcher to call the police. These two different words were never used during the conduction of the interviews.

Additionally, the authors made the choice that the interviews would only be conducted by video call, that is, by having access to real-time images of the participants. This would allow the first author to read the body language of the interviewees to recognize distress or discomfort due to the unwanted presence of other people in the same room and would allow her to adapt the course of the interaction if that was the case. Again, this type of situation never occurred during the conduction of the interviews.

The participants were also given the option to use a Zoom predesign background if they felt more comfortable not showing their houses, an option that was not made

by any participant. Likewise, the first author also decided to show, as background, her living room with her personal items (i.e., books, flowers, sofa, photos), and even her cats. This personal choice was based on the fact that it is fundamental for researchers to demonstrate that they are fully engaged with the interviewees (Surmiak, 2018), and, so, showing a cozier and more familiar environment as a background was crucial to establish empathy and rapport with them.

The interviews were among three “windows” from three screens: the first author, the interviewees, and the translators, who were in three different locations. Like the first author and the participants, the translators were asked to keep their cameras on, and they also decided to share their personal spaces (as they also conducted the translation from their homes) as their backgrounds. As expected, there were situations of bad internet connection, breakups, and poor sound/video quality. Despite that, conducting online interviews was advantageous and turned out to be very prolific, allowing the authors to reach out to participants in distant geographical locations from the north to the south of Portugal, to enlarge the sample size, and to save a lot of time and money in commuting and traveling, which would not be possible if the interviews were conducted in person.

There is also an ethical obligation to ensure that no individuals or communities can be identified and subsequently harmed or stigmatized because of the research. Since the ethics committee did not provide any sort of safety protocol regarding online interviewing, the authors of this chapter defined some measures that would be adopted to guarantee the anonymity of the participants and the confidentiality of the data collected. Instead of saving the recordings online, the Zoom platform also provides local storage in the PC files, and this added measure was taken in this study so the data collected would not be available online, and therefore, it would be more difficult to access by outsiders to the study. Adding to this, all possible personal identifiers (i.e., first or last names, phone numbers, institutional details) were removed from transcriptions, recordings, or any other materials to prevent “*any linkage between the data collected*” (Lobe et al., 2020, p.5) and the participants. It is also important to stress that the first author did the transcriptions of all the interviews by herself, as an added protection measure of the participant’s identity.

## 4 Conclusion

As showcased in this chapter, the mentioned study on the process of becoming a refugee woman faced some limitations most related to the objectivity of scientific knowledge. These limitations correspond, above all, to those related to any investigation that uses qualitative methodologies. But, in particular, to those arising from the application of data collection techniques that require a more intimate relationship between the researcher and the subjects studied. The knowledge produced under these conditions is the object of questioning, and often of doubt, especially among apologists for epistemologies with a positivist bent, in terms of the validity, reliability, and objectivity of the results obtained in these investigations.

For these epistemologies, in general terms, validity, reliability, and objectivity come from the suppression of any subjective interpretations and arguments in the production of knowledge (Imai, 2017). But, in reality, qualitative researchers are interested in knowing the experiences, opinions, expectations, values, and perceptions of the participants, and in doing so, to accomplish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, that create the trustworthiness of the research (Chandra & Shag, 2017).

To follow these qualitative goals, the authors paid considerable attention and importance to the reflexivity exercised throughout the conducting of the study that had a significant effect on its development and improvement. The function of reflexivity involves the awareness of its processes with, first, the purpose of enriching the lived experience and, secondly, articulating this awareness as a contribution to the deepening understanding of the field. Although the main data presented in this chapter are related to the methodological challenges faced by the first author during the fieldwork, it should be noted that the second author assumed a crucial role in the reflexivity process. As demonstrated in this chapter, the adoption of an interactive reflexive research process where the first and the second authors debated the challenges faced extensively, allowed the first author to engage in a continuous process of scrutiny and critical interpretation, not only in relation to the participants and the context of the research but also to herself, which is the substrate of the ethical dimensions of research practice. These first and second authors' interaction played a key role that allowed the first author to guarantee compliance with informed consent and respect for the autonomy, dignity, and privacy of the participants, and, at the same time, to ensure her integrity, so that the results achieved in this study can be considered trustworthy.

However, there are some aspects that the authors did not consider while conducting the study presented in this chapter that they would like to point out as possible elements to be taken into account by other researchers. No contact was made with the refugee women after the conduction of the interviews, which the authors feel would have been important, in order to fully track the impact of participating in the study on them. The same must be said in relation to the translators, who were not asked about the impact of the refugee women's testimonies on themselves. Likewise, no specific protocol for protecting them was thought off or implemented. Because the translators had prior experience in sensitive research, these aspects were not considered by the authors, but it would have been cautious to ask how they managed their emotions during and after the interviews. The authors also regret that they were not able to send the research results to the participants, since the doctoral thesis was written in English, and most of the refugee women do not speak English. However, the authors hope to soon be able to list the main conclusions of the study in a document written in French and Arabic, so that, albeit in a summarized form, they can have access to the study's main results.

In sum, the study explored throughout this chapter followed a constructivist approach that contemplates the achievement of trustworthiness in research through a balance of reflexivity and subjectivity, as stressed by Williams and Morrow (2009). In this sense, reflexivity was a crucial activity that sharpened and deepened, in one



hand, the authors' awareness of the understandable countenance of their ethics as individuals conducting research, and one the other, the need to constantly navigate between the much-desired objectivity and the inevitable subjectivity that arises from the relationship created between the researcher and the participants.

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