

Chapter 3

The Role of Context and Culture in Quality of Life Studies

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Dube (1999) points out that culture should be understood as an essential element in the production and reproduction of daily social life, that is to say, as the attitudes, norms and symbolic and structured practices by which social relations are perceived, articulated and experimented thus, defining this way culture in and by those relations, which are predicated to its power.

Culture endures forms in which practices and specific belief systems are implied in social relations and experienced within them.

The inclusion of culture by the social actors, leads to the question of identity, regarded as a set of internalized cultural repertoires through which social actors symbolically outline their borders, thus differentiating themselves from the rest of the social actors, in socially structured and historically specific contexts (Giménez 2000).

On the other hand we presume, like Shin et al. (2003), that quality of life is a multidimensional phenomenon which involves a variety of elements that refer to human needs whose satisfaction requires material and immaterial elements.

Likewise, we believe that the objective and subjective dimensions of life are distinct entities and that people carry out a positive or negative assessment of their life experiences according to what they consider to be good, their conception of it, and of everything that occurs in a specific cultural background, in space and time. Quoting Christopher (1999), the notions of well-being have cultural roots.

Considering the above mentioned, this chapter focuses on the notion of culture, the research on the relationship between culture and quality of life, and the impact of culture on the qualitative researcher.

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3.1 Culture

Giménez (2005), refers to the force of the symbolic conception of culture, and the impact deconstructivist criticism of Geertz's original position has had on it; ergo, being considered as "a set of disperse and off-centered symbolic practices", "as a symbolic repertoire of action strategies" (p. 3).

He further sustains that defining culture through a reference to the symbolic processes of society, confers the latter a specific and autonomous field, as a dimension of life in society. This conception leads to the fact that culture is particularized and pluralized in what Sewel calls "concrete cultural worlds" (Socially structured historical contexts) (1999, p. 52), thus allowing the use of the term "cultures".

Thompson (1998) on the other hand, considers that culture may be understood as a set of historically transmitted guidelines on meaning, embodied in symbolic forms through which individuals communicate and share their beliefs, experiences, etc.

Closely related to the idea of culture is the question of identity, the conception of the former having consequences on the latter.

Giménez (2005) distinguishes interiorized forms from objectivized forms of culture and considers that the semiotic conception of culture requires the symbolic models, to be related to the actors, who incorporate them subjectively and express them in practice; the underlying concept being that there are no actors without culture, and viceversa. In other words, culture is "habitus" (Bourdieu 1980), it is experienced from the point of view of the social actors and their practices, this being the really existent culture, the one found in social experiences and the "worlds of life" of the interacting actors.

In this sense, Giménez (2004) points out that the theory of identity is part of the broadest background of the social theories, whereas identity is an essential parameter which defines the social actors, conceived, according to Bassand and Hainard (1985), as having the following characteristics: (a) it occupies one or various positions in the social structure, (b) it permanently interacts with other social actors, in a permanent process of socialization and learning, (c) it possesses a certain form of power and a self-image with relation to others, and d) it generally has a project, and the means to carry it out. There is no sense in action without social actors which are, in turn, defined (among other elements) by their identities.

Grimson (2012), on the other hand, marks a distinction between culture and identity by pointing out that, while the cultural aspect refers to practices, beliefs, and routine and sedimentary meanings, the aspect of identity alludes to the feeling of collective ownership. He considers that being aware of this distinction allows an understanding of the shifting of the cultural and identity borders, taking into account that they do not always coincide.

Restrepo (2010) considers that identities are relational, that they are expressed by marking differences hence they are not marginal and, therefore emit practices to delineate "us" as an alternative to "others", thus identity and difference become mutually constitutive. In that respect, Grossber (2003) points out the need to develop relational methodological frames for the study of identity and differences in their mutual constitution.

He, furthermore, adds a relevant observation regarding the fact that identities do not only make allusion to differences but also to inequality and domination, i.e. that the abovementioned border marking is related to preservation or confrontation of different hierarchies (social, political, etc.). Thus, identities acquire sense both for those who assign them and for those who assume them.

He believes that identities (individual and/or collective) are not defined forever; their denotative and connotative elements derive from concrete practices of meaning and from a specific interaction among different subjects, thus evidencing a multiplicity of meanings.

Regarding interactive construction, social identities require, as a condition of plausibility, stable interaction contexts constituted as “familiar worlds” related to everyday life, which the social actors are acquainted with from within, for practical purposes.

In connection with this, Schütz (1974) points out that the experiencing of common sense in everyday life is a reference of signification which “constitutes the result of the selective and interpretive activity that men carry out as a part of nature, or in the act of observing it” (p. 37).

This intersubjective world of everyday life which existed before we were born and has already been experienced by others (as predecessors) as an organized world is now subject to our experience and interpretation. Moreover, this world possesses types of experience which are common to all men, and such typifications are everyday life structures that regulate both their comprehension as well as their personal experiences. Thus, man is immersed in a biographically determined situation, is defined by a physical-socio-cultural environment, which furthermore includes a moral and ideological position. In other words, society is also equivalent to a social space constituted by differentiated fields (Bourdieu 1987) all of which constitute the exogenous social context of social identities.

3.2 Identity Regarded as a Value and Values Regarded as Components of Identity

Identity is valuable to the subjects because it is the central value around which subjects organize their relationship with the world and with the other subjects, and also because all differentiations/distinctions inherent in such identity imply a search for self-value in relation with others (Lipiansky 1992).

In the development of men’s social lives, we will find the foundation values they are regulated by, and the substance of their knowledge and beliefs. These norms affect the social order and, quoting Goodenough (1975), those values, with overlapping beliefs and feelings, acquire their own logic within which they not only understand but also make life meaningful.

This diversity of values is reflected in the perception of the quality of life of the subjects and of the groups they belong to. In this connection, Hofstede (1984), probing into the cultural relativity of the concept of Quality of Life, points out that

“quality” is a question of values and is related to the “good” and “bad” standards; moreover, that those values partly depend on personal choices and, to a great extent, to the cultural context.

3.3 Quality of Life and Culture

Christopher (1999) argued that definitions of well-being are culturally rooted and in the same direction, Kawana-Singer et al. (2010) consider that quality of life is a multidimensional and subjective experience of well-being that is culturally constructed. Diener and Diener (1995), for example, found, at the individual level of analysis, that self-esteem was correlated with subjective well-being, but the correlation between subjective well-being and satisfaction with different aspects of life, varied according to the country (individualist or collectivist nation).

Regarding subjective well-being, which according to Diener and Fujita (1994), comprises the assessment people make of their lives, both in the affective and cognitive areas, Triandis (2000) adds that an adequate way of understanding the significance of the construct is by considering the factors related to it, and that the factor that predict subjective well-being may differ according to the different cultures. In this regard, he highlights that Diener and Suh (1997, quoted in Triandis 2000) found that emotions predicted people’s subjective well-being in individualistic cultures, while in collectivist societies this was achieved by emotions and behavior in compliance with norms.

On the other hand, Oishi et al. (1999) pointed out that values mediate subjective well-being while, according to Triandis (2000), literature shows that, at cultural level, individualism is correlated with subjective well-being, and collectivism with tightness. He explains that in the latter societies (collectivist), people experience high levels of anxiety, fear of not being “correct” or “appropriate” in their behavior, which might cause them to be criticized, rejected or excluded.

Diener and Diener (1995) pointed out that satisfaction was more strongly predicted by self-esteem in individualistic cultures than in collectivist ones.

Another example is given by the social and interpersonal natures of the processes that underlie the effects of marital status on subjective well-being, which suggest that the relation between them (subjective well-being and marital status) may be different across different cultural contexts, considering cultural variables that may influence the negative effects of divorce. Related to this, because collectivist cultures give more importance to norms and individualist cultures to emotions (Triandis 1995, 1996), the subjective well-being of persons who live with a significant other in an individualist culture, may be just as high as that of married persons while in a collectivist culture, it may be not as high as that of married ones (Diener et al. 2000).

Forougui (1995) investigated the quality of life cross-cultural differences amongst Persian immigrants to Australia, Australians and Persians residing in Iran, and examined the mediating role of social support on life quality. Considering these three samples, the most important result was that, despite the fact that objective

quality of life was significantly different across the three groups, no such differences were observed for the subjective quality of life and no relation was found between years of residence in Australia and social integration with subjective well-being. Considering the impact of social support and life quality, it was found a positive relation between subjective support for the Persian and Australian sample, but it was not found for the Persian-Australians.

Schumaker et al. (1993), examined the relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction in residents of Fukoku, Japan, and Melbourne, Australia, using the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell et al. 1980) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al. 1985). Australian subjects showed significantly greater life satisfaction and less loneliness than Japanese subjects, and results suggest that loneliness in Japanese subjects did not emotionally translate into life dissatisfaction as it did in Australian subjects.

Gokdemir and Dumludag (2011) focused on the role of socio-economic factors (income, unemployment levels), and non-economic factors (identity, religion and culture), to explain the reasons for disparity of happiness levels among Moroccan and Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Arnhem, Den Haag, Rotterdam and Utrecht). The results showed that Turkish immigrants report much lower levels of life satisfaction than Moroccan immigrants, while the socio-economic factors considered failed to explain why this happens. The findings showed that the effect of absolute income for Turkish immigrants was insignificant and the effect of relative income, matters to them. The authors studied the role of identity, language, religion, media, and discrimination to explain the different levels of life satisfaction for immigrant groups and found that a strong sense of "Dutch" identity has a positive effect on life satisfaction (although Moroccans with a strong sense of Dutch identity are more satisfied with their lives than Turks with a strong sense of Dutch identity). Finally, results showed that immigrants who identify themselves as Muslims are far more satisfied than the other immigrants identified as Turkish or Moroccan.

Skevington (2002) explains the reasons for the need of cross-cultural measures and points out that the pragmatic studies by which they are enforced provide theoretical evidence of the universality or relativity of the very concept of quality of life. She mentions that The World Health Organization Quality of Life Assessment group (WHOQOL) defines quality of life as "the individuals' perceptions of their position in life, in the cultural context and value system he lives in, and in relation with his aims, expectations, standards, and worries" (p. 136). Furthermore, the group has put forth that perceptions and interpretations are rooted in people's culture and that they should be regarded as the first definition of quality of life which has, directly and formally, incorporated cultural components to the body of the definition rather than recognize cultural influence as an external variable.

Verkuyten and Kwa (1994) studied whether, among minority young peoples, alternative forms of ethnic self-identification are equally healthy in terms of psychological well-being, considering Chinese and Turkish young peoples living in the Netherlands. They distinguished four different types of self-identification, following Berry et al. (1986): acculturative, assimilative, dissociative and marginal.

All types were found among Chinese and Turkish young peoples, but the Turkish subjects showed a stronger dissociative self-identification than the Chinese. Among the Chinese, an acculturative and especially a marginal orientation were associated with less happiness, decreasing self-concept stability, and decreasing collectivistic orientation, while among the Turkish subjects both of these orientations were associated with lower self-esteem.

In the scope of an exploratory research of the individualist-collectivist construct and well-being, Owusu-Ansah (2004), examines the relationship between cultural orientation and subjective well-being in Ghana, confirming that in such a collectivist cultural context, high levels of collectivism might be associated to high levels of subjective well-being. Nevertheless, individualism has also been positively associated to subjective well-being.

Theuns et al. (2012) pointed out that, in cross-cultural research on quality of life, researchers deal with the impossibility to compare subjective wellbeing assessments across cultural groups and they sustain that the Information Integration Theory provides a framework that allows a better understanding of the composition of the concept of “satisfaction with life as a whole”, across different cultural groups. In this context, they studied the way students in Algeria, Belgium and Poland integrate information on a variety of life domains into an appraisal of “satisfaction with life as a whole” and found that different integration models coexist in all the studied groups, and that the prevalence of these strategies differs across groups, concluding that cultural differences in the conceptualization of overall satisfaction with life exist, and that differences between cultures result from different distributions of these conceptualizations.

3.4 The Impact of Culture in the Work of a Qualitative Researcher

From the researchers’ stand-point, it is necessary to point out the impact of culture on their personal, professional and political dimensions (Tonon 2013).

Regarding the personal dimension, two fellow historians describe their personal attitudes towards diversity, in close connection with the plurality which characterizes their original contexts, highlighting imagination, open-mindedness, the attitude of trying to stand in the other’s place, etc.:

A fellow historian, 47 year old female, explains:

Originally belonging to an urban and foreign family circle crossed by long preserved narratives, previous to relocalization, allowed an early training in cultural diversity. Melodies evoking far-off lands, like Egypt in Aida; descriptive literature of fascinating scenarios imagined by Salgari; family stories about general and particular events that took place during the European World Wars in East Africa, and the very spirit of those times, became a challenge to imagination and knowledge.

Another fellow historian, 44 years old, narrates:

My genes are, somehow foreign; a Paraguayan mother of Spanish and Italian descent, has made me broad-minded which, I think, is what helps me regard things without prejudice, think twice before giving my opinion, because I try to stand in the other's shoes...

In that respect, Scott (2008) sustains that research is not an area free from values and subjectivity the researcher is always present. Frost et al. (2010) point out the habitual use of that term "subjectivity" makes allusion to a representation of the individuals' inner world, which makes them uncognizable to a stranger and only partly cognizable to its owner.

Hence, the research process affects the researcher which is, in turn, affected by the researcher. This requires the researcher to be reflective and self-critical regarding his subjectivity in the research, and also the effect of the latter on his own.

Finlay (2005) makes allusion to a research process which implies a reflective commitment with the "embodied intersubjective relationship" we have with the participants in the research. He describes three impenetrable levels of reflexivity which culminate in a reciprocal and an interconnecting insertion of others in our selves, and of ourselves in others, in which the understanding of others and our self-understanding are merged in a mutual transformation. Subsequently, Finlay (2009) gives further details on two processes related to subjectivity and the researcher, namely, *epoché* and reflexivity.

As to the professional dimension, some specific aspects of the original profession and up-bringing become evident in a 47 year old fellow historian, in her allusions to the closeness to diversities and the production of knowledge she has found in different institutional environments. These are her views:

Once I had found my way, academic contents enhanced my knowledge, paradigms, and methodologies, but did not always succeed in paving the way: omitted spatiality, stigmatized cultures, controversial values, and prejudiced looks, produce alert signs. In that sense: How could multicultural boundaries be bridged if knowledge seemed to be limited to a dominating center which alienated the whole? The wish to exceed that Eurocentric structure and plunge into a qualitative research on historical-cultural issues, on topics that had never been embraced or deemed to be subject to revision/up-dating, gave way to a contribution to integration, a reassessment of values which tended to unify cultures. Field-work, on the other hand, allowed an encounter between researchers and subjects, respectful of the self-perception of their own identities. Today, the cultural kaleidoscope has been amplified and the methodology diversified, hence the research has become enriched and open to conceptualizations which, are slowly adjusting the image of reality, so necessary to the understanding of multiculturalism. The researcher, a mere mediator in this process, must continue to exalt the relevance of diversity and intercultural connection.

Thus, Rodriguez de la Vega (2011) points out that university activity, inserted in community life, is closely related to citizenship and spaces for public action, at the same time she sustains that university education which acknowledges and implies varieties of learning and forms of apprehension of reality, contributes to the articulation of citizens and professionals in the construction of knowledge that may account for a world of diversity. The author points out that the option is a university

which eludes immobility and recovers its place as the critical conscience of each historical time, while recovering historical memory, re/establishing ethical values that consider a plurality of views regarding the citizens' professionalization/action relationship; monitors the extent of integration; undertakes the social impression of the production and transmission of knowledge; articulates a conscious competence of diversity, and the need for team-work, thus articulating one another's access, with equal enunciation.

In a similar line of thought, El Ghali (2011) adds that the relationship between university and society must complement each other, though not based on university-productive sector concept, and he quotes Olivé by sustaining that the fundamental role of university is to produce knowledge in order to extend it to society and include the outcast.

Regarding the political dimension, Mojica Mendieta (2011) sustains that globalization implies an epistemological challenge to social sciences, that is to generate new analytical categories which may explain the space-time transformations of the social processes, and political conditioning in people's activities. Thus, it is important to re-elaborate new innovative forms of social research in order to understand and explain the structural violence within each culture, and among different cultures. Likewise, he explains that the knowledge and recognition of the political processes and conditioning of scientific practice may contribute to eradicate determinism, relativism, and pretended objectivity in the different axioms of political sciences.

Retamozo (2007) points out that the construction of epistemic subjectivity springs from an attitude which articulates will-power and conscience, non-dissociable from an ethical-political position, which considers that social knowledge must be function as to social projects that tend to fulfill political axioms (Dussel 2006). Therefore, the construction of this subjectivity contradicts a presumed neutrality of values and assumes knowledge as transformation praxis.

The impact on the different dimensions of qualitative researchers refers, in turn, to the possibilities and limitations of their task, in the scope of a permanent interpellation among the abovementioned dimensions. In this respect, Liamputtong (2010) emphasizes the interpretive and flexible approach of qualitative studies and makes allusion to a healing methodology which, paraphrasing Denzin et al. (2008), refers to a methodology of the heart [...], embracing the ethics of truth based on love, care, hope, and forgiveness; its principle being love, hugging, compassion, and seeking reciprocity. We believe that this is related to the reference given by Yáñez del Pozo (2010), who, quoting Estermann (1998), points out that the primal wish of the Andean human being (or rune) is not the acquisition of abstract knowledge of the world around him but "a mythical insertion, a cult representation, and a symbolic celebration of this reality". Hence, we consider that research emerges as a task of interpretation and explanation of the universes under consideration, in a process in which people emerge as agents of knowledge.

Regarding symbolism, it is understood by Giménez (2005), following Geertz, as the world of social representations, materialized in sensitive forms, which refers to

a set of social processes of significance and communication, illustrated by a fellow historian, a 55 year old female, who undertakes the question of language:

From History which is my field of expertise, studies the human beings' past through ruins, written documents, oral tradition, and other traces that human action leaves behind. Though there is a quantitative line of work, our techniques are, without a doubt, essentially qualitative. And it is from those traces left by human action that we make a selection, classify, reconstruct, interpret, and explain. When we study the past of "others", we must also add the action "translate" to that of interpreting. The mastering of the language is important, though the actual task of translation is very complex. Although the process of acquiring the code must be linked to a profound knowledge of that "other culture" to attempt to understand the connotations of their expressions, it is obvious that it will never be exact [...] those who have no notion about that code will evidently be at a disadvantage, for they will have to depend on another interpreter, and that will mean a new filter will be added [...]

In this sense, the symbolic aspect is perceived in this context as a constituent dimension of social life, as a whole; furthermore, the reality of the symbol does not end in its function as a significant, but also as a means of becoming immersed in the world, as well as a mechanism of power.

Temple et al. (2006) point out that the discussion on translation/interpretation evidences an increasing number of comments opposing the idea that whoever interprets or translates the text is irrelevant, so long as the translation in question is "objective". They quote Venuti (1998) who sustains that the predominant translation practices result in the rewriting of the text rather than in a transference of meaning, since the translators select the words and concepts in their attempt at reconstruction, and more than one choice may be considered correct in that process. In other words, translators and interpreters are part of the context in which the information is produced.

On the other hand, the contact with "the others" is fundamental, for their mutual understanding constitutes a central epistemological principle (Mojica Mendieta 2011) which derives in a dialogic relationship, in an unimposed contemporaneity which, in turn, implies a quest for intersubjective knowledge. A fellow 55 year old female historian expresses the following:

Experience—field work—in the society under study, is also vital. Still, it is also true that though we may spend many years immersed in that "other" society, and even be lucky enough to get to know its members day by day, and its culture from practice, it will always be a fragmentary vision in space, limited in time.

In that respect, Christians, 1997 (quoted in Christians 2011), points out that, considering that all human cultures have something important to tell, social science research acknowledges individual values, without overlooking universal human dignity.

Focusing on a cultural context intimately related to the researchers' own origin often makes this fact evident, by the opposition of different knowledge. The same colleague sustains that:

We are not exempt from these risks even if we are lucky to be a sort of cultural "bridge" because of sharing the "other" culture's family origins, or being acquainted with it through

the culture we received by birth and up-bringing. It is a fact that systemic research and studies cannot be replaced by origin.

In this connection, Chaitin et al. (2009) agree with Sansonse (2003), who regards ethnic identity as a process affected by history and contemporary circumstances, as well as by local and global dynamics, and other matters such as hierarchy and power. They further add that Banks (1996) considers that it is more useful for researchers to regard ethnicity as something that exists in the “observer’s head” as well as an analytical device or tool used by academics to explain the actions and feelings of the subjects under study.

A critical attitude towards self-formation—a permanent characteristic—together with research work in general and personal development in particular, seem to seek the insurance of an acceptable trajectory in terms of related knowledge and ethics. In this connection, a fellow 55 year old female historian points out:

I’ve began to study the history of the Japanese people and their culture, over 30 years ago, informally at first and later on systematically, gradually learning from contact with Japanese colleagues (their points of view), also through Latin-American colleagues, other experiences and warnings to avoid falling into traps set by our own culture [...] our critical vision is also enhanced as we increase our knowledge, it sometimes leads us to overrate negative aspects in the worst of cases, or simply to highlight them, in order to break with stereotypes—only to end up creating new ones.

Pedulla (2012) reminds us that stereotypes may play a central role in molding attitudes and behaviors, thus often being related to prejudice and discrimination. On the other hand, Dovidio et al. (2010), give more precision to these interrelated terms. Regarding stereotypes, they believe that the latter are cognitive schema used by social percipients to process information about others, which not only reflect beliefs regarding the characteristic features of typical group members, but also contain information about the different qualities of those “others” who influence the emotional reactions towards the members of the group in question. They further make allusion to prejudice, indicating that the latter is conceptualized as an attitude which, like some others, possesses cognitive components (beliefs regarding a certain group), affective (dislike), and co native (a negative disposition towards the group under consideration). As to discrimination, they sustain that it implies more than social distinction among social objects, it also refers to inappropriate and potentially inappropriate treatment towards other subjects, on account of their being members of some community.

This critical attitude and permanent reflective state of alert is evidence of the amalgam of our work with the researchers’ own private lives. Thus, a 57 year old fellow historian describes it, on the basis of his research study of Japan which has gone through several stages:

Firstly, in my stage of academic formation, approaching the “other” represented approach challenges which left their marks. Doubtless, Said’s work was essential and, though it was not directly related to Japan, it opened a space for reflection in order to attempt to make a careful approach of the study of the “Japanese”. Probing into the history of Japan was another watershed, for the mere acquaintance with that country broke with the preconceived classification of the world’s historical evolution (Western) which had, so far, determined my vision of the world (non-Western peoples also had history, as Georg Iggers, accurately

expresses in “La historiografía del siglo XX”). Finally, another essential element was the fact that Japan was my place of residence and I was directly related, not only to academic life and the Japanese’s own focus on study but, to a greater degree, everyday “contact” with the “other”, and waking up and going to sleep in a “space” that was molding and constructing the ways to approach.

Taking these theoretical and practical elements helped me challenge the chief assumption of a certain history conceived under a presumed “objectivity”, understanding that there is no such thing as an “object of history”. Yet another even more determinant element was a more personally intense and direct approach to the social history of the Japanese in Mexico. The connection to “social movements” which I had upheld since my early years as a student, were broadened by of the migrants of that nationality in my own country, particularly the stage of vigilance and confinement they had to undergo at the outbreak of World War II. [...] This put an end to a stage and gave way to another: the gist of the first stage was my living experience in Japan; while the second hinged upon the way in which migrants displayed the reproduction of two societies in their everyday lives. Thus, “culture” revealed itself in the complexity of the actual world of economy, politics and social sciences which I had conceived as “historical science” fields. The social and intellectual framework of my research, so far, was an INTERNAL and CONSTITUENT part of the study of the first 40 years of the twentieth century, joining two temporal spaces of my research and of my own life. The spaces, daily controversies in which I dwelt in the last decades, were not separate, much less alien to what I had been studying and researching: historiography and reality had taken my academic world by storm.

In the same line of thought, another fellow, 44 year old female historian, points out that, to the work done in this field she could add her marriage to a Japanese immigrant, together with her artistic side “my artistic vein was another contribution to the events during the Conferences on Japan, by singing Japanese Songs or lecturing on the Colonia Urquiza Community I was able to illustrate it”.

That dynamic of interlacing with one’s private life is reflected in long range influential challenges, in life itself, and in research work. Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) focused on the challenges experienced by qualitative researchers who deal with sensitive themes, but we believe that their impressions may apply, in general. They show the challenges faced by qualitative researchers, like intruding in people’s lives, sometimes in critical moments, requiring them to talk in detail about their experiences, sometimes even during long periods of time; constructing rapport with the interviewed subject, which may even lead to information, not necessarily related to the research topic, but relevant since it has generated this rapport; generating a dynamic of reciprocity between the researcher and the subject of research, involving the necessary care that this requires; the researcher’s vulnerability; developing bonds with the participants; keeping their distance; appreciating the privilege of taking part in this kind of study and the responsibility it implies. Different authors give a broader view on the themes mentioned herein; some of them are: Dickson-Swift et al. (2006), Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005), Ceglowski (2000), Daly (1992).

To sum up the views of the aforementioned colleagues, the 55 year old female historian, mentions that

The Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie, spoke, in a TV conference, of the peril of a single story, making reference to a negative vision that predominates in the Western World on the Sub-Saharan African peoples [that we extend to any disciplinary outlook of a qualitative approach]. In that sense, so long as we fail to produce a great number of studies from

the broadest variety of perspectives, we shall never be able to approach each other in a full dimension. Finally, we may conclude that it is important to run the risk of making mistakes, while being conscious of our subjectivity and conditioning factors, although the knowledge of the language continues to be fundamental because if we persist in resorting only to the available translations as a means of getting to know others, we will merely be recycling information, thus contributing to the preservation of only one story/history.

3.5 Summing Up

The assessment that the subjects (and/or groups) make of their quality of life is related to their cultural background, situated in a specific point of time and space. Likewise, the practice of qualitative research and its results are socially constructed and also determined by space and time.

The researchers' task is developed in this context which refers to the consideration of plural conceptions of reality—which, in the Jaina theory of Multilateralism, is known as *anekāntavāda* and considers such conceptions as valid, even when they contradict each other (Tola and Dragonetti 2009)—that, in fact, refers to the way in which we approach and construct the other and therefore ourselves, in the background of social research projects that aim at transformation.

In other words, researchers express themselves within specific interpretive communities and give a personal configuration to the cultural elements of their research, thus offering their observation and interpretation which are socially situated between the world of the researcher and that of the subjects under study; therefore there cannot be a unique true interpretation. Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) embrace the theme of “space between” and follow Kanuha (2000) who points out that it is important to consider more comprehensive forms of acquaintance and understanding of people, practices, and cultures, so similar yet so different from what we are.

That construction we make of ourselves, which takes place in our dialogue with others constitutes, according to Taylor et al. (1994), relationships in a space of self-assertment and self-discovery. Denzin and Lincoln (2011), point out that qualitative research not only involves a scientific project but also a moral, therapeutic, and allegorical one; and, in that respect, our own moral dimension is nurtured by the social connections which bring us closer to the different known conceptions of Good and creates a commitment that urges us to be active participants of the moral articulation of a community.

Lincoln and Denzin (2000 quoted in Christians 2011) consider that the challenge to those who write about culture is the act of becoming involved in the same moral space as the people subject to their research and, from that perspective, the research strategies are legitimated in terms of vitality in order to shed light on the best way of generating human welfare.

All in all, “the problems of the social sciences must be, ultimately, related to the visions of the world they are contained in” (Guba and Lincoln 1994, quoted in Christians 2011, p. 322).

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