



**DEVELOPMENT
CORRIDORS
PARTNERSHIP**

UK Research
and Innovation



Qualitative research: understanding “data” and “fieldwork encounters”

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Aims:

1. Introduce a few basics to [purely] qualitative social sciences research.
2. Think critically about “data”, and the relationship between the researcher and the world/phenomenon studied.
3. Discuss the application of qualitative research based on open-ended narrative interviews.
4. Reflect on how this method might work in practice [think about epistemology]
5. Case study – group discussion
6. Ask *why to use this method?*

1. What counts as “data”?
2. What is the role of the researcher in “data” collection?
3. What is the role of the world/phenomenon researched?
4. *What is the relationship between these 3 elements?*

The way we understand the connections between the mind of the researcher and the world operates “in the background of our specific ways of how we produce knowledge” or “data”, i.e. **methodology**.

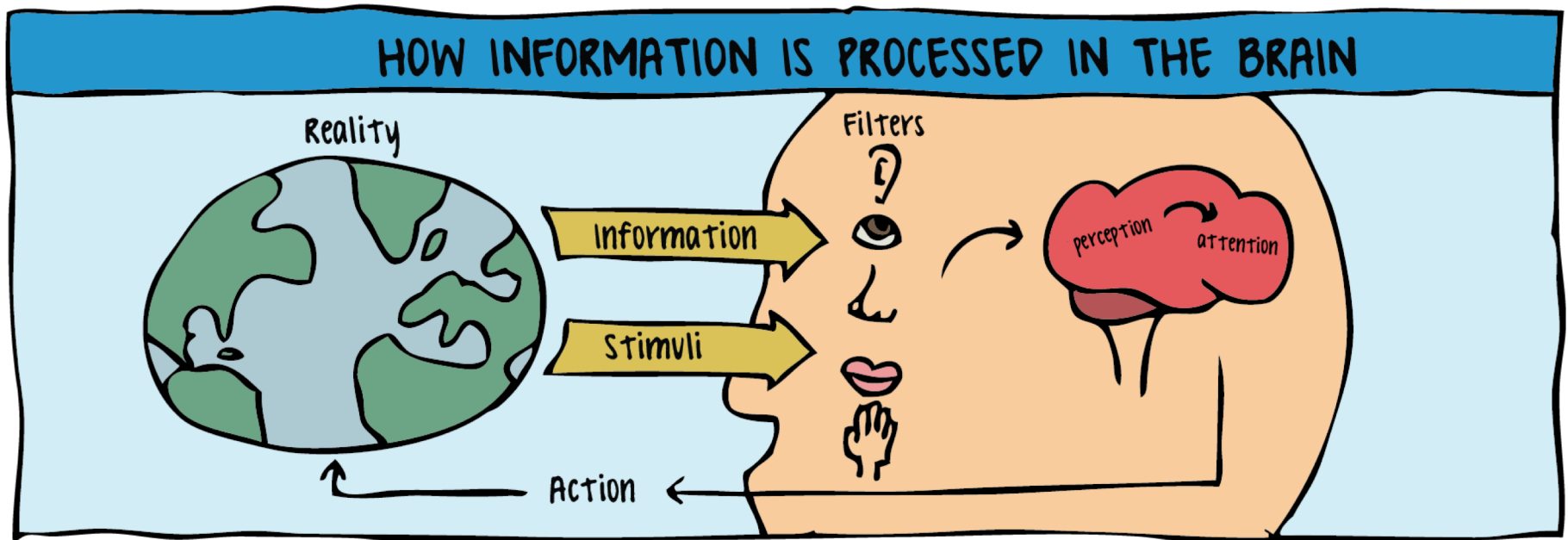
For scientific research to be robust, it is necessary to acknowledge three basic underpinnings of any scientific enquiry:

1. the researcher
2. the world researched
3. the character of the relationship between the two

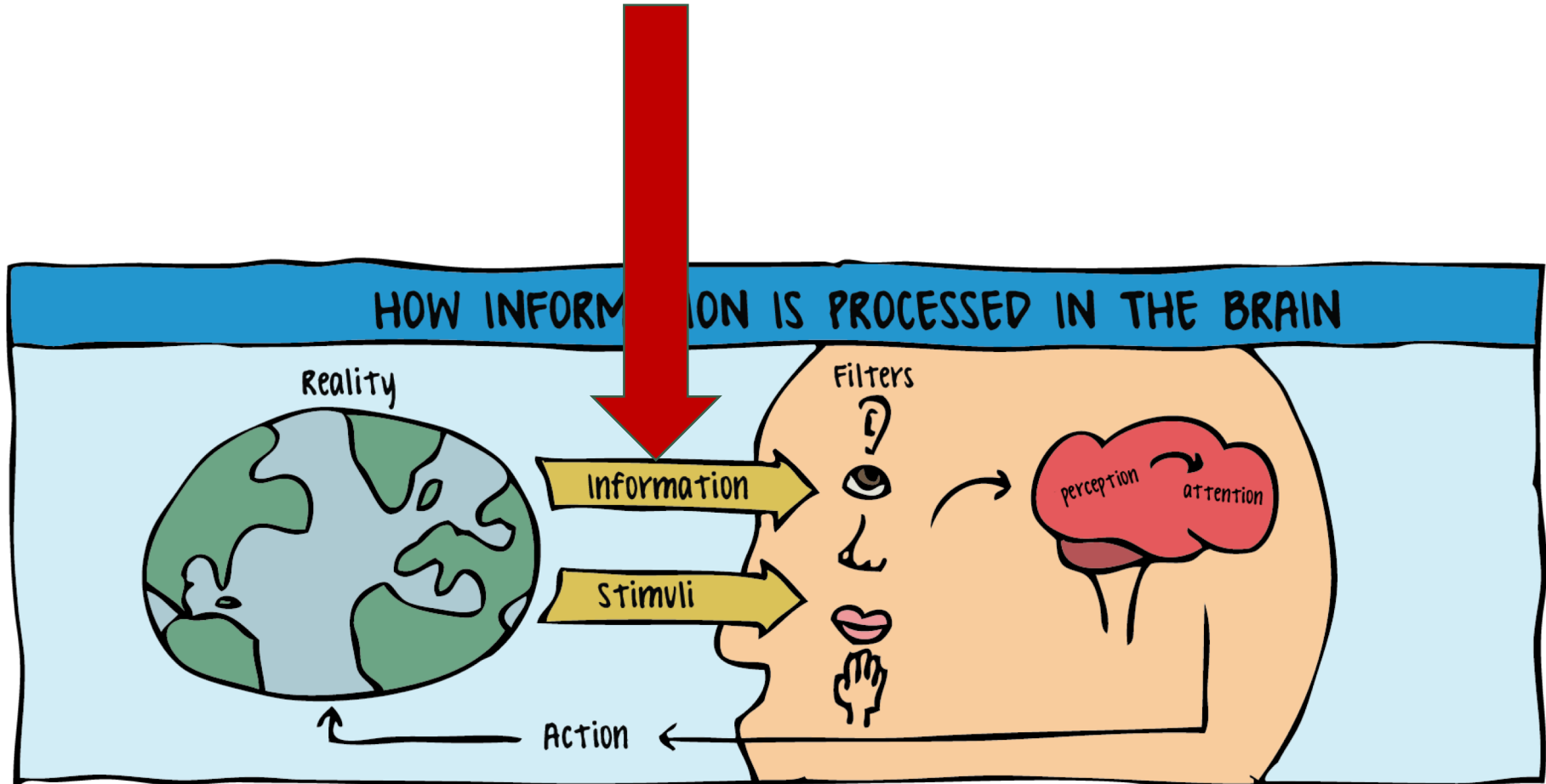
Note:

any type of methodological approach is valid as long as it is consistent within its own philosophical system.

Quantitative research



Qualitative research questions/focuses on this very process



Qualitative Social Sciences Research

A detailed focus on the very foundations of **how we think we can get “data” or “facts” from fieldwork/research.**

“Data” not just as an end in itself, but also as a contested process that needs to be reflected on carefully.

Observing your world



**Clear-cut
boundary
between the
world studied
and the
researcher
simply **does
not exist****

Challenges the dominance of objectivism

The relationship between the researcher and the world is of mutual interdependence



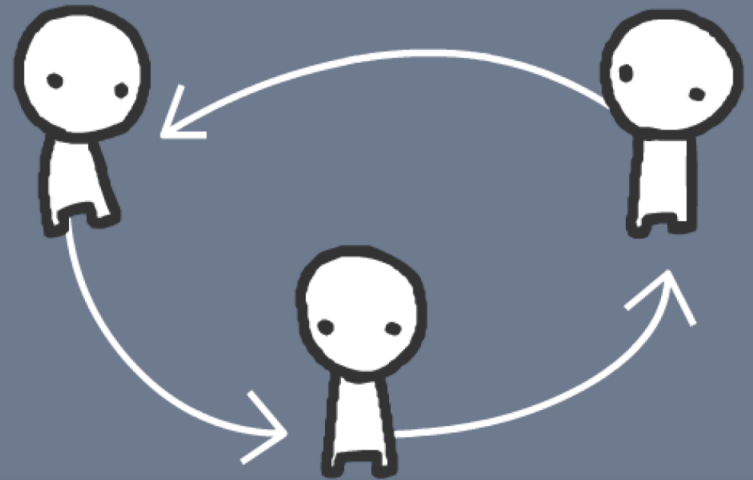
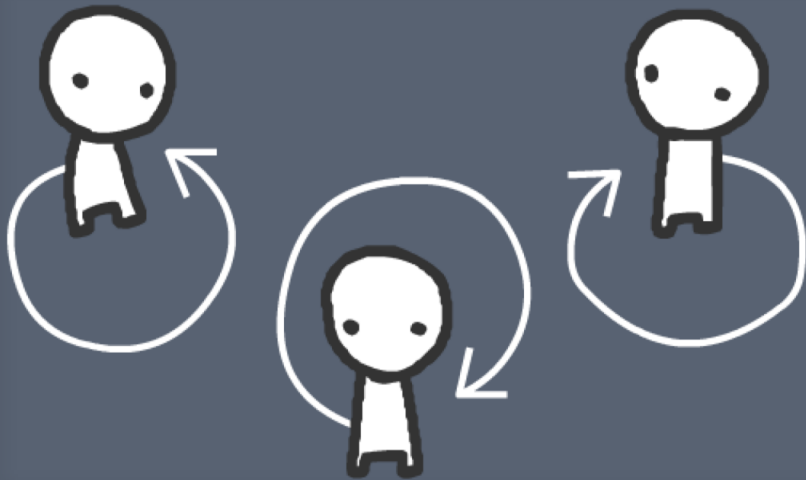
Subjectivism meets **constructivism**



**In fieldwork research, there is
no simple relation of
independence**



Fieldwork research as fundamentally **interdependent**



All empirical claims are not simply representational; instead they are value-expressive

IMPLICIT BIAS

WHAT WE DON'T THINK WE THINK





**all generated knowledge
delineates
a particular
vantage-point**



How is this expressed in research?

- Scientific communities
- Approaches they take
- Terms they use
- Each of them have their own *vantage-points* that *highlight* some things, but also *obscure* others

Stakeholder engagement



The term “stakeholder” originates from business studies and has been used to depict “a party that has an interest in a company and can either affect or be affected by the business”.





"OK, we've defined the project objectives. Now it's time to establish the stakeholders."

Stakeholder

vs

**socio-economic
groups/class**

This very act of defining somebody as a “stakeholder”, or rather choosing a different term, demonstrates that

the words and terms that we use in our research reveal certain values and assumptions we implicitly hold about the world and the people we study.

Can we think of other widely-used terms that might be perceived as problematic?



“Rural **community** development in Africa”

What about “*development*”?



Postdevelopment theory holds that the whole concept and practice of development is *a reflection of Western-Northern hegemony over the rest of the world.*



“Reality” as a social construct

The world researched as a social construct

ABOUT US

*Partners from Tanzania, Kenya, China and the UK are coming together to **build capacity so development corridor decision-making can be based on sound scientific evidence and effective use of planning tools and procedures.***

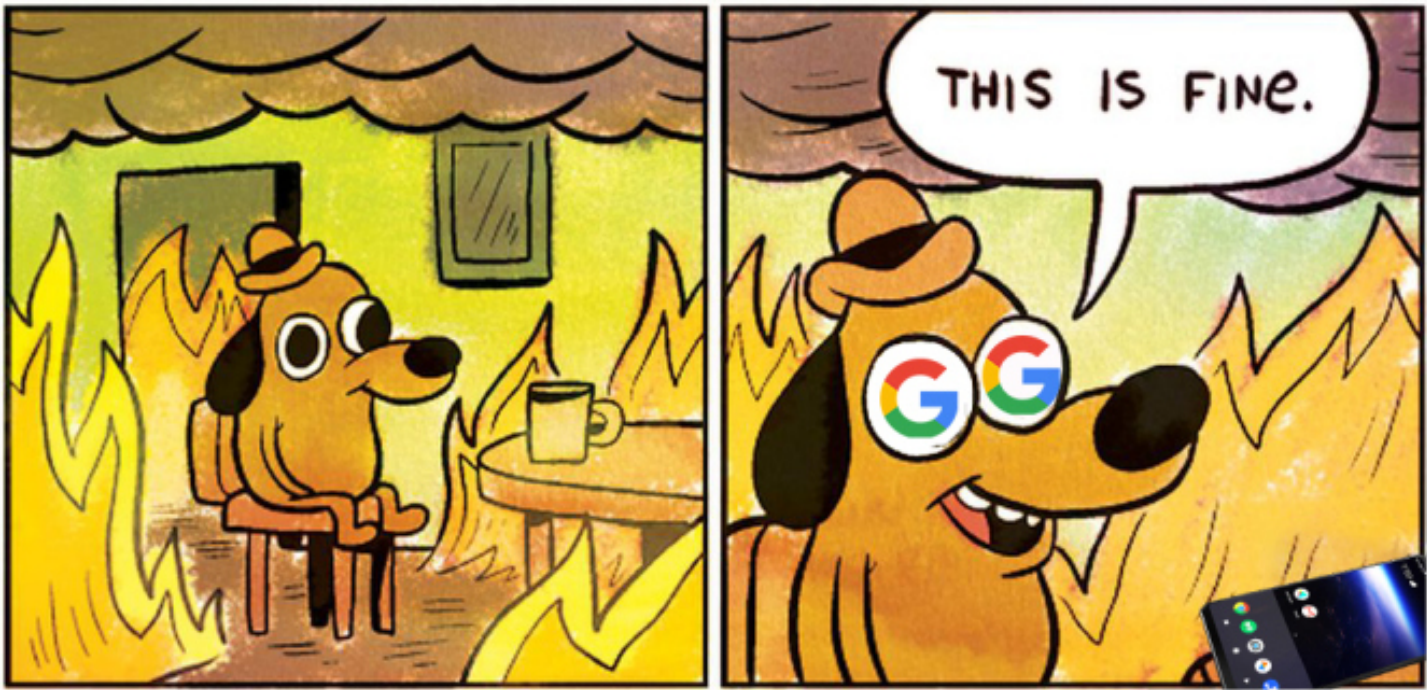
Funded by the UK Research Council's Global Challenges Research Fund the Development Corridors Partnership began in October 2017 and will end in December 2021. The Partnership will **build capacity to address concerns about development corridors** by encouraging scientific collaboration and **stakeholder engagement in key issues of corridor planning and management.**





How can these dynamics be addressed with “sound scientific evidence and effective use of planning tools and procedures”?

Technical solutions to **political** problems



So...

There is no
single objective and
non-contestable way
to depict “reality” and
the “real world” out
there.



What does this mean?

Critical social scientists say that the external world that we as scholars study is “accessible to us only through language and various forms of representation and meaning that it gives us”.

As such, the generated knowledge, or empirical claims or data about the reality, are always to some extent not value free.

This means that there are no unbiased, fixed, unchangeable ways of knowing.

What does this mean in terms of doing research and collecting “data”?

Fieldwork is not simply a means for exchanging information but is rather shaped by multiple experience of encounter between the researcher and the researched.

Therefore, knowledge-building is understood as an ongoing, tentative process that emerges “through conversation with texts, research subjects, or “data”.

Fieldwork is not just a source of information or “data” but is also a source of methodological reflection.

For doing fieldwork this means:

1. It is necessary to acknowledge various standpoints of research participants. That is, the focus is on understanding why people are saying what they are saying?
2. The “reality” is not just simply out there to be discovered also demonstrates that the particular position of the researcher should be equally accounted for.

Part 2

Fieldwork encounters and narrativity

Open-ended interviews

- Within this critical social sciences research tradition open-ended interviews are a particularly prominent research method.
- Open-ended interviews unfold in a conversation between the researcher and his/her research subjects.
- This method is seen as able to provide access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories and thus is seen as enabling research subjects "to recount their lives in their own words and speak about any issue they pleased.

Example,

- Tell me about yourself.
 - Tell me your life story.
 - How would you describe life in your village?
 - What do you think about *this project*?
-
- ... follow-up questions/engage in the conversation.

Asking questions:

Phrased in such a way as to encourage the interviewee to speak in their own words – is the easiest way to encourage people to talk freely.

Rather than 'Do you remember the General Strike?'

Ask 'Tell me about the General Strike'

Rather than 'That must have been terrible'

Ask 'How did you feel about that?'

1. 'How' is one of the most useful words to start a question with:

How did that happen?

How did you feel?

How did you do that?

2. 'What' is also useful:

What happened then?

What do you think about...?

What was the best/worst...?

3. Why?

Why do you think...?

Why did you...?

Be a little careful with 'Why...?' as it may sound accusatory and result in your interviewee becoming defensive.

4. Avoid questions with 'yes' or 'no' replies.

Do you remember...?

Is it...?

How would you formulate questions to find out the impact of a specific project on people's livelihoods?

- *What is the impact of the xx project on your life?*

vs

- *How do feel about the xx project?*
- *What do you think about the xx project?*

What is needed for this?

1. Listening skills

A good listener is someone who is interested in what they are being told, and who helps to create a good environment for someone to tell their story

Focus on:

2. Verbal - what is being said?

Loudness; Tone; Pitch; Clarity; Pace; Silences

3. Non-verbal communication – how things are said?

Facial Expression; Gaze; Posture and Position; Proximity; Gestures; Physical Appearance.

4. The importance of eye contact:

- Rather than verbally reinforcing what the interviewee is saying;
- A better method is to maintain eye contact with the interviewee.
- Non-verbal behaviour - nods of the head, eyebrows raising, facial expressions – are excellent ways of keeping an interview moving, as long as they are culturally appropriate.

- This method is seen as able to provide access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories and thus is seen as enabling research subjects to recount their lives in their own words and speak about any issue they pleased.

However,

- This does not capture the "truth" of those people's experience.
- They reveal how people actively choose to **represent** their life experiences.

Fieldwork: “reality” or “representation”?



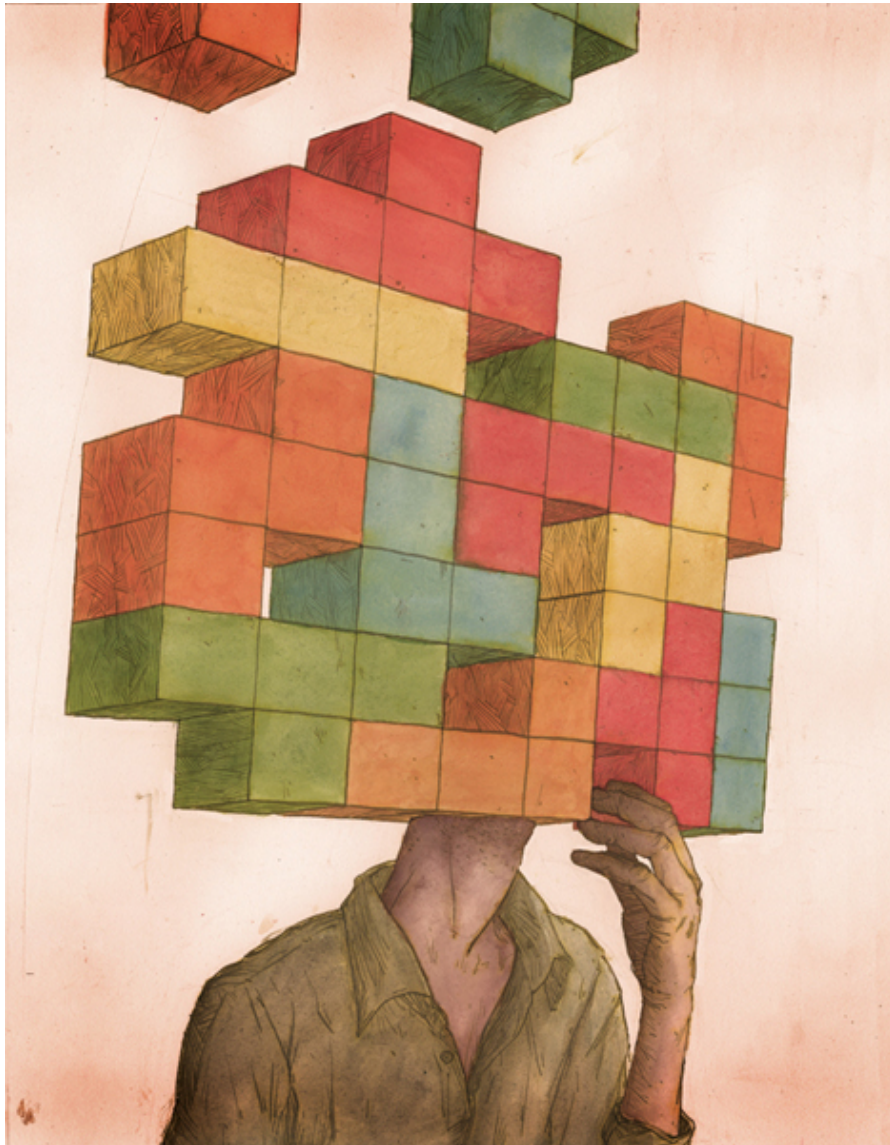
Narratives

as “public and personal ‘stories’ that we subscribe to and that guide our behaviour. They are the stories we tell ourselves and others about the world(s) in which we live” (Baker 2006, 19).



When people provide **accounts of their lives**, they arrange and describe elements and events of their personal stories **in order to create meaning and mediate between the self and the world**, and, in doing this, they create 'the selves' as characters of their stories that they tell us.





Narratives we
construct for
ourselves and others
should be understood
**as a way of
constructing a
“sense of self”**
(Elliot 2005, 126).

This means that:

the fieldwork situation, and the analysis that follow, we not only need to capture what has been said, but also think **why it has been said**.

i.e. we need to focus on what **conditions determine particular responses** from the people that we engage with in our fieldwork on the ground.

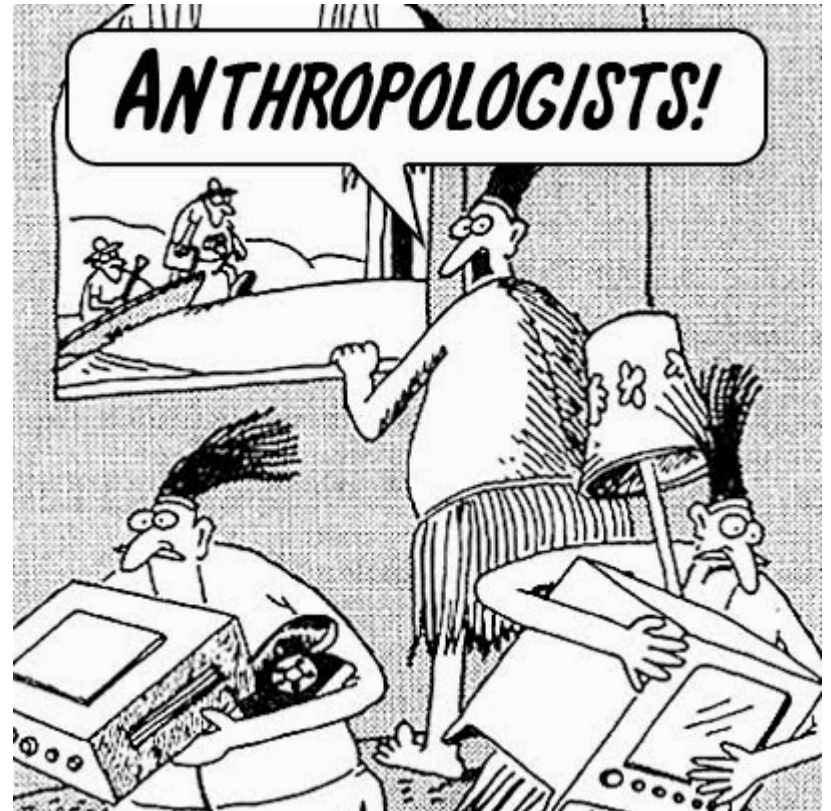
*That's why social scientists take note of such factors as **gender, age, ethnicity, race**, all of which depend on a particular research question.*

Example

How do large-scale development projects affect people differently according to gender, age, socio-economic group, ethnicity?



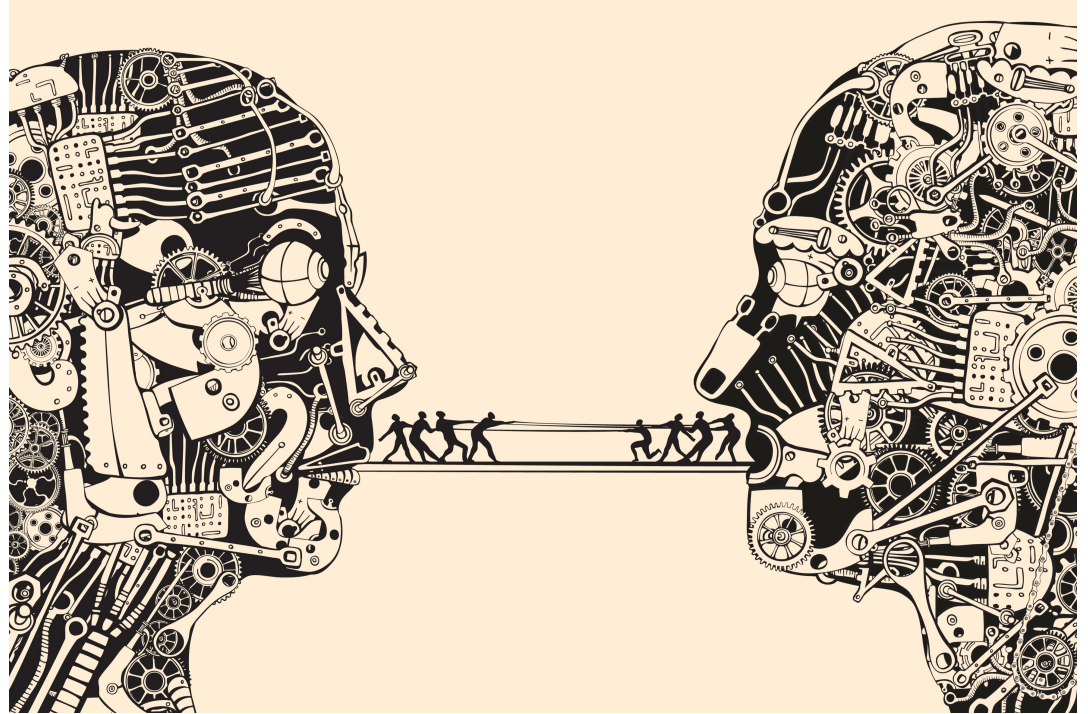
**How does our
presence
influence what
our research
participants tell
us?**



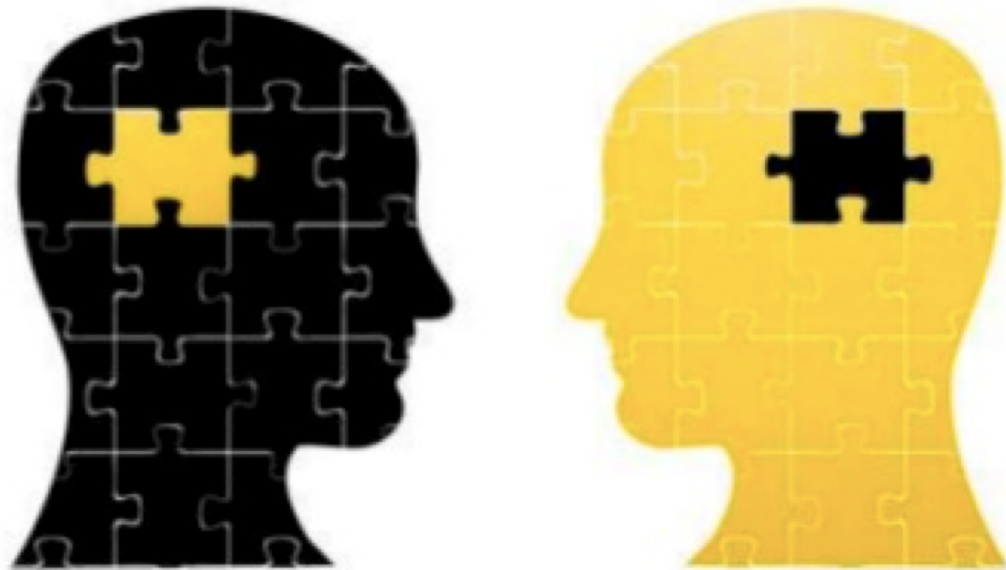


This means that:

the data that emerges out of “fieldwork” is not simply out there to be discovered, but is continuously negotiated between the researchers and the people that they engage with as part of research.



“we come into being as a response to a call from the other” - the researcher triggers an active moment of articulation of oneself as a subject .

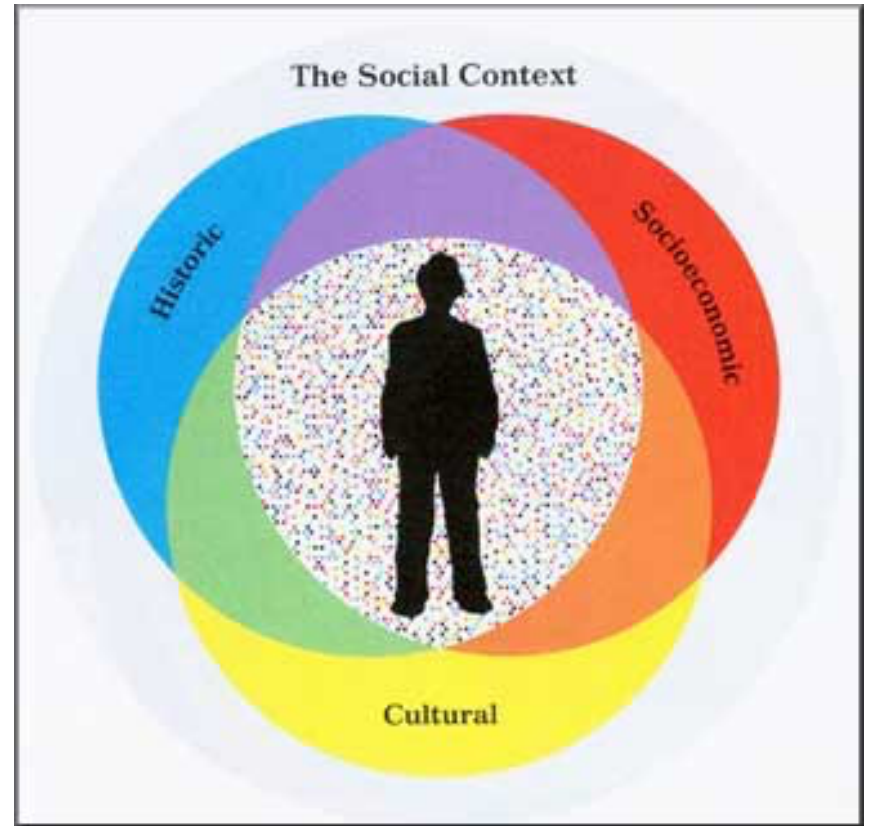


However,

The narrator [research participant] has the position of authority in relation to the listeners, both immediate and distant, and thus is the “author of his or her own story” and “an active shaper of outcomes”.

Therefore, “through the lens of narrative theory, one can understand the narrator’s telling of stories as attempts to understand themselves and to act and position themselves <...> *at the time of telling the stories*”.

broader contexts in which narrators are embedded 'speak themselves' through the individual story, and, through the act of narration, the speaker responds to broader social, political, economic, environmental contexts in order to actualize a particular 'presentation of self'.



What does this mean for our understanding of “data”?

1. The “data” does not exist independently, but is always shaped by the interaction between the researcher and his/her research subjects.
2. Therefore, data that emerge in fieldwork encounters are contingent articulations of oneself that unfold through the implicit negotiation process between a researcher and a research participant.
3. At the same time, these narratives [as “data”] are embedded in broader social, economic, political, environmental contexts. The individual speech acts reveal those broader contexts.

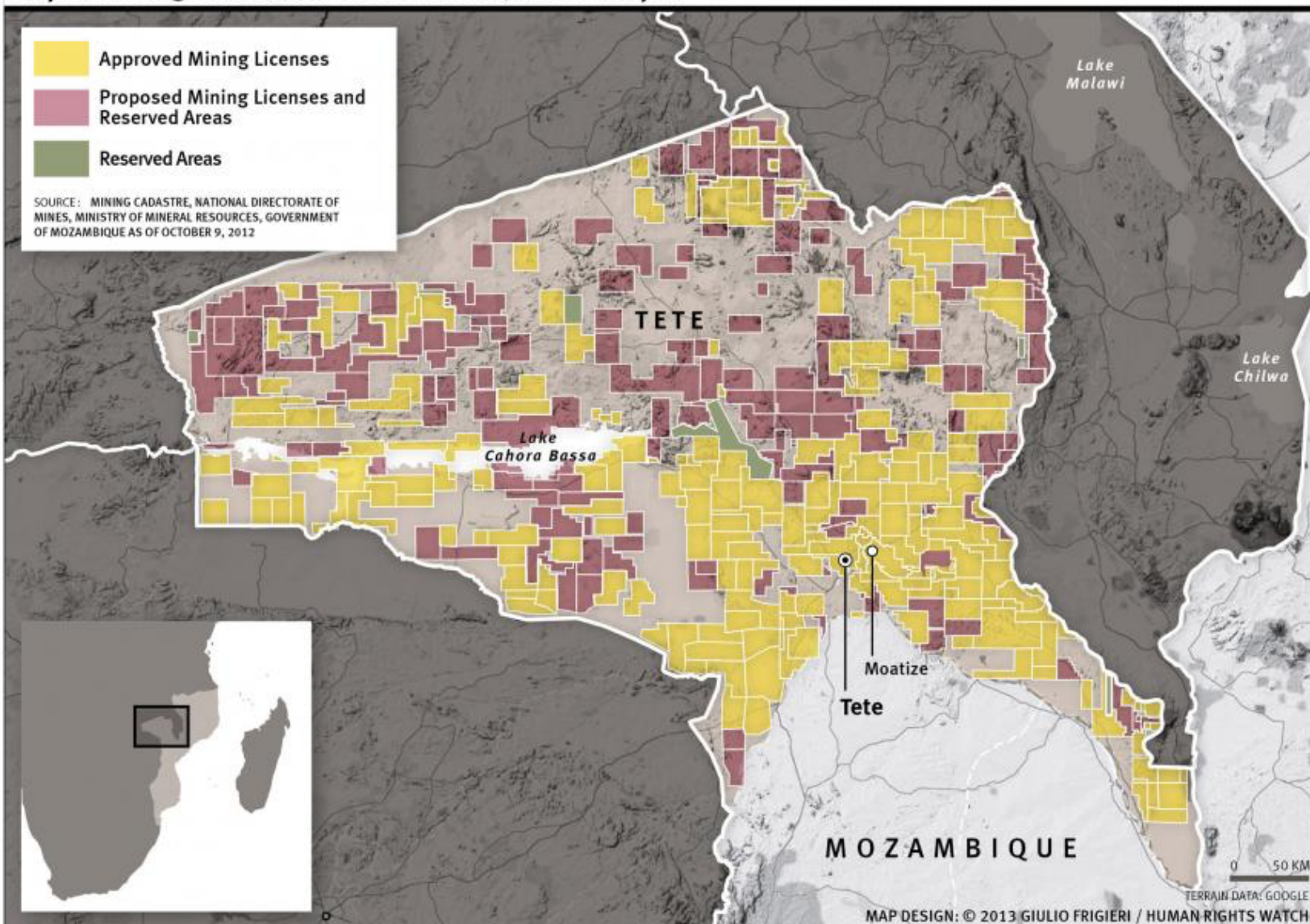
How is this done in practice?

Group exercise

Mining industry in Mozambique



Map of Mining Licenses in Tete Province, Mozambique



This map is based on data from the Mozambican government's mining registry in October 2012 and does not reflect any new, expired, or canceled licenses since then. There may be additional licenses not reflected in this map due to some gaps in the obtained data. Not all exploration activity leads to the discovery of commercially viable deposits and to the development of mines, so this map does not imply that all of the shaded areas will eventually be covered by mining operations. But the crowded number of licenses contribute to problems including resettlement of local communities, water resource management, and conflicts over claims to land use.



Question

What are the social impacts of the mining industry in Mozambique?

Methodology falls within the philosophical tradition of *constructivism*

[more specifically *post-constructivism*

that claims that there is no neutral viewpoint from which to assess the validity of analytical and ethical knowledge claims]

Method: open-ended narrative interviews

Narratives of suffering

“before we did not have much, but at least we had land, we had something to do to feed our children. Here we don’t have anything. This is not living, it’s suffering”.

Narratives of contestation

- “With the resettlement our life became worse, it was not organized well, we were promised a lot of things, but until now we have not received anything. I had to do something to survive. So I decided to go back and work the land”.
- “We are the real landowners here, if they came here to bother us, to tell us that we can’t be here, we would take their cars and they would have to walk back to their offices. Even you, standing here, we could do anything we wanted to you, you can’t escape now”, laughed the group leader.

After a few minutes of silence, one of these men lamented: *'What can I do? They [the mining company] have the government on their side, there is nothing we can do to stop this, our lives do not mean anything'* , his voice broke. 'But I wanted to know what kind of activities you would do to support your family when you can no longer work here', I asked him again, myself feeling the inappropriate weight of my question. *'You need to come back here to see what is going to happen, I have no fucking idea'*, he replied abruptly, and walked away into the direction where the rest of the men were standing.

**How can we make sense of this
narrative?**

Your fieldwork experiences?

Concluding remarks:

1. It is important to acknowledge **how we come to collect and understand “data”**, and what is the role of the researcher and the researched [people/phenomenon] in the process, and what is relationship between the two.
2. From the perspective of critical social scientists, **all forms of representation we use in the scientific language are non-objective.** That is, there are certain biases in our language/terminology.

3. Therefore, the question is

- how do we decide what we include and what we exclude?
- how do we frame that which we study?
- what are the benefits and disadvantages of using particular types of terminology?
- in other words, who do we privilege and who do we disadvantage by the language we use?

4. This demonstrates that research is not necessarily 100% objective, but that we as researchers make certain choices in terms of how we represent “reality” that we claim to understand and know.

How do we approach fieldwork research?

1. We think about the agency of the people we are interviewing – i.e. why they are saying what they are saying.
2. How does our presence influence this?
3. What about social/economic/economic/environmental contexts?
3. "Data" as constantly negotiated.

Why use this type of qualitative research?

Problem-solving theory vs *Critical theory*

It takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing *social and power relationships* and *institutions* into which they are organized, as the *given framework* for action.

It stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and *asks how that order came about*. Critical social sciences research shows how this order manifests in complex and contradictory ways.