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Solidarity now? Other stories about researchers, otherness, and polyphony in research

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Abstract

We are three researchers within the field of mental health. For the past 3 years, we have collaborated with colleagues in Greece on evaluating the pilot project Refugee Outreach Mental Health Team. Part of our role has been to evaluate how refugees and asylum seekers experience the treatment and support offered by the team. The findings from the evaluation have been presented in a published research report and we have thereby "completed our task." However, following the completion of the formal obligations, we have continued to dwell on the less outspoken dialogues and inner voices. Not only those of the participants, but also the ones of the researchers that are present before, during and after research interviews. Inspired by relational autoethnography, we share some "other stories" about how the research processes touched us deeply and how it has left traces in our minds and bodies long after the project completion. We reflect on how relational processes of polyphonic meaning-making can be used to develop deeper insights and knowledge as well as a call for action. We suggest that the sharing of other stories can provide new knowledge and new understandings of how knowledge can be developed. Our hope is also that it may serve troubling or evocative purposes, and encourage the development of dialogues by invoking inner and outer voices. Perhaps, it may even call for solidarity in others and ourselves.

Keywords

Solidarity, relational autoethnography, polyphony, dialogue, refugee mental health

> *The first thing that I noticed was the logo "Solidarity now" on the wall of the building where the interview was about to take place. I was thinking about the terms of solidarity these days. Why does it seem to be so difficult to act on and show solidarity with human beings outside our close circle, a difficulty that seemingly increases proportionally with the geographical and cultural distance between us and them? At what point does the other become just that—"the other"? Under what circumstances can we become "the other"?*
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> - Reflection note (Greece, 2019)

We are three researchers, "Marit," "Trude" and "Bengt," from the University of South-Eastern Norway. In addition to having an academic background in mental health and substance abuse research, the three of us are experienced practitioners. For the past 3 years, we have had the privilege of being invited to collaborate with colleagues in Greece on evaluating the pilot project Refugee Outreach Mental Health Team (ROMHT). The aim of this project is to develop methods for providing home-based mental health services to

asylum seekers and refugees with severe mental health issues. Part of our role has been to evaluate how refugees and asylum seekers experience the treatment and support offered by the team.

The purpose of research is multifaceted. To contribute to knowledge development and new insights and to fill what are typically defined as knowledge gaps are perhaps the most common and prominent aims. In the field of mental health research, this could typically involve filling "knowledge gaps" about the nature and causes of what is commonly referred to as mental disorders (Jablensky, 2013). However, in social and human sciences, an important purpose may

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also involve "troubling" the world and the ways knowledge about the world come about. In this context, this involves challenging the tacit assumptions governing specific aspects of life (Grant, 2016; Klevan et al., 2019). In line with this is also a research aim of fighting injustices by discovering something to improve the situation (Thorneycroft, 2020). We would also argue that research may serve evocative purposes through speaking to people's hearts and not only their heads (Pelias, 2004). Thus, research can be understood as a means of communication that can connect people through spoken and written dialogue (Brinkmann, 2020). Furthermore, through its intersubjective nature, the very process of conducting research can be perceived as an act of communication that affects those involved on many levels. This implies that research also affects the researcher. Thorneycroft (2020) challenges the idea of the researcher being an objective agent who remains unaffected by research. He calls for more focus on the researcher's role and position and how the research process affects researchers. Through exploring what we often refer to as the "lived experiences" of research participants, the researcher is given new and expanded lived experiences. As researchers, this also provides us with opportunities to reinterpret or reimagine our previous lived experiences and to give possible directions for future ones.

The diverse purposes of research described earlier may be hard to distinguish in "real life" and will in our experience often overlap when planning, conducting, and disseminating research. Furthermore, these purposes may be intentional or unintentional. It is impossible to anticipate what reactions and consequences research may entail for the research community, clinical field, "the world out there" in general, for the research participants and for the researchers.

Nonetheless, the stated purposes of research, carefully carved out through research aims and research questions, will guide how it is carried out and disseminated. What happens next is beyond our control. Thorneycroft (2020) argues, "Our research can never end" (p. 6). This calls on us to constantly and critically reflect on the research we do, how we do it, what purposes it serves, and how it affects us. Research might haunt us. It leaves marks in our minds and bodies. We would argue that this might also be the case for research participants.

There are a variety of ways of disseminating qualitative research and of writing up scientific reports or papers for publishing in academic journals. We have the more "traditional way" of scientific writing, and then there are more creative and critical ways. In the research project that this article stems from, our job was to evaluate the ROMHT pilot project and to enhance knowledge of what are experienced as helpful mental health services for refugees and asylum seekers. We have conducted the evaluation and presented our findings in a published research report (Karlsson et al., 2020a). The report presents thematic findings from the project and follows an Introduction–Method–Results–and–Discussion (IMRAD) structure.

Other stories

There is nothing wrong with the traditional way of scientific reporting and writing; it just sometimes seems to lack the capacity of encompassing the myriad of stories, emotions, expressions, and voices that are present in—and after—qualitative interviews (Brinkmann, 2020). Sometimes, what you want to express and share does not fit into the regular academic scheme, nor is it given its rightful place. We have some other stories that we want to share, stories about how research touched us deeply, and how it continues to haunt us. These are stories that have not ended (Thorneycroft, 2020). Perhaps, they could be perceived as stories of many stories and of many voices. As qualitative researchers, we are used to listening to people's voices and accepting and using them as "data." Together and separately, the three of us have conducted a very large number of individual and focus group interviews. They have informed us, enlightened us, challenged us, moved us, and changed us. However, in writing up research findings, our personal notions have usually been left out.

It is a widely accepted idea that focus group interviews generate data through discussions and meaning-making between participants (Malterud, 2012; Morgan, 2016). In a dialogic understanding of knowledge development, we are all participants in group processes. We affect and become affected. According to Frank (2005, 2010), understanding other people through dialogue is based on two contrasting principles. Dialogue requires difference in order for us to have something to say to each other. It also requires similarity. Otherwise, we would not have the common ground necessary for understanding each other. This is all very well. But what about all that is not told, everything not expressed in words? What about the inner voices, not only those of the participants but also those of the researchers that are present before, during, and after interviews? The diversity of these inner and outer voices can be understood as polyphony, referring to the words that are spoken in dialogues and to the activating of inner dialogues. All the inner voices that we carry can be described as traces in our minds and elements of previous experiences. These traces can be activated by human encounters and new experiences that in some ways relate to earlier experiences. Thus, they can lead to new voices and the development of new narratives (Seikkula, 2008).

Although we have been assigned and taken on the role of researchers, we are still people trying to explore human experience, sometimes in and about harsh realities and appalling experiences. We explore through words, through themes, and questions carefully developed and written down in our attempt to elaborate on the research questions. The participants listen, make sense of the issues and questions, and respond. It is a dance, a ritual dance of taking turns, of inquiring and responding according to what our respective roles require from us. What about the expressions in our

faces, tears in our eyes, nods, and reassuring smiles? What about the different dialogues that take place during the interview? There are the obvious dialogues between the researchers and the participants, taking place in shared time and space, in the research setting. However, there are also less outspoken dialogues present in the room. These could be the awakening of our inner dialogues in the actual research encounters. Such unspoken dialogues can also be present in the researchers' minds and bodies long after the research has finished (Thorneycroft, 2020; Wyatt and Taland, 2018). What are possible ways of meaning-making of the polyphonic processes during and after a focus group discussion? Can these processes be used to develop deeper insights and knowledge as well as calls for action? In this article, we share some experiences that to us were poignant and moving. Perhaps, this sharing can provide new knowledge and new understandings of how knowledge can be developed. Perhaps, it can serve a troubling or an evocative purpose; perhaps, it can encourage the development of dialogues by invoking inner and outer voices; and perhaps, it may call for solidarity in ourselves and others. We do not know. As the stories have been transformed into words and the words have been written down, how they will be interpreted is beyond our control. Inspired by Turner (2013), we suggest that all we can do is "put it out there and you can make of it what you will" (p. 227).

A brief context

Our experiences and stories are situated within diverse contexts of culture, time, and space. The following descriptions are parts of the so-called "research context," providing an outspoken and official rationale for the original study. However, it is only one of many contexts for our "other stories."

New figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reveal that a record of more than 70 million people were forced to flee from their homes last year because of war or persecution. This is an increase of 2.3 million people in just 1 year. It is also well known that basic human rights are violated and that there are overcrowded and unsafe living conditions in many refugee camps.

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." This is Article 1 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was a milestone document in the history of human rights when it was proclaimed by the UN in 1948. Refugees have for several decades been deprived of these human rights.

The "case of Greece" is of major importance in the refugee situation in the Mediterranean. More than 1 million refugees and migrants have passed through Greece since 2015. Currently, at the time of writing, it is estimated that close to 90,000 refugees and asylum seekers are accommodated in the country. Recent evidence (Charlson et al., 2019) shows an increased prevalence of mental disorders in populations in emergency settings and conflict-afflicted areas, significantly higher than in the general population. Refugee populations have been shown to be more vulnerable to develop mental health problems in a broad evidence base (Reed et al., 2012; Sundram and Ventevogel, 2017).

To meet the mental health needs of the refugee population in Attica, Greece, ROMHT was established in 2018. The refugees were beneficiaries of the Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) program of the UNHCR. The team approach of ROMHT is inspired by the assertive community treatment (ACT) methodology emphasizing outreach, relational and communicational work, social and practical needs, and what the person and his or her family find most urgent. Safety and continuity of care are emphasized. Integration of refugee mental health care in the generic mental health and social care systems is also a central part of the teamwork, including needs of networking, capacity building, and supervision. From April 2019, another team was set up in Thessaloniki, aiming to provide outreach mental health services and capacity building activities there.

Methodological reflections

The initial qualitative evaluation used focus group interviews, fieldwork observation and reflective teams as methods for generating data, with the ROMHTs in Attica and Thessaloniki as contexts for the study (Karlsson et al., 2020b). Interviews were documented using audio recordings, while field work observations were documented through field notes. The context and basis for the "other stories" that we aim to tell in this article is a focus group interview with service beneficiaries from one of the ROMHTs. Telling these other stories was not part of the original plan of the project. However, research and human encounters leave a mark on people.

This article is inspired by autoethnography, through its use of the researchers' subjective and storied experiences in order to reflect larger cultural, social, and historical issues (Adams et al., 2015). More specifically, it is inspired by relational autoethnography, acknowledging that voices and stories are always dialogical and in the making; we shape and are shaped through encounters between each other's and our own voices and stories. Meetings between people are also meetings between experiences, stories, contexts, and cultures and, when the experiences and stories of the others are explored, they are given meaning and developed during and after such meetings (Klevan et al., 2018; Toyosaki and Pensoneau-Conway, 2013). We hope the reader will agree with us that sometimes the other stories also have an important mission.

Bengt

We are sitting in a room in an industrial area outside Thessaloniki. The premises belong to the organization "Solidarity Now." We are three people from Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) and two people from

Association for Regional Development and Mental Health (EPAPSY). There are three cultural mediators present. The concept of cultural mediator is used in this project instead of translator, as the job involves cultural competences and more comprehensive skills than simply translating words and sentences from one language to another. One cultural mediator translates into Farsi, another into Arabic, and the third into French. The participants in the interview are a young mother with a baby of 6 months, a mother with a 4-year-old daughter, a young woman, a young man, and an elderly woman. The interview starts with a review of consent declaration, clarification of the background and context of the interview, anonymity, and the use of an audio recorder. All participants sign the consent form in their language and give them to the team leader. They all agree that the conversation will be taped and that no names will be mentioned, and if so, the names will be deleted. The participants are invited to feel "free" to say whatever they want. I wonder to what extent they can feel "free" to speak, given the vulnerable situation they are in as refugees. We emphasize that their experiences and perspectives are very important to us and to the work of EPAPSY. We are sitting in a kind of circle around two tables. Trude has a member of EPAPSY on her left. He is sitting in a chair, while the Arabic cultural mediator, the young woman, and her baby are sitting in a sofa. Next to them are the other mother and the young woman. The 4-year-old girl is going back and forth, with and without toys. Marit is sitting in the next sofa. By her side are the elderly woman, her cultural mediator and the young man. Then comes the Farsi cultural mediator. The team leader and I are sitting in chairs. Behind us, a member of the EPAPSY team is sitting at a separate table. I feel somewhat uncomfortable in the situation. I am wondering if there are too many of "us" researchers. I am concerned about how the participants experience the situation, with "us" trying to understand their world for an hour or two before we leave them alone again. When everyone is ready, the recording starts and Trude asks the first question.

From the very first moment, I find the situation very special, in the sense that Trude asks the question in English which is then translated into Greek and then into Farsi, Arabic, and French. The responses from the different participants go back the opposite way. During the time we talk together, the conversation develops in a low-key and gentle way. To me, being a part of this conversation becomes more and more rewarding and remarkably powerful to experience, both in terms of what the participants are saying and the framing of the interview as I have described. It is amazing to hear the buzzing and talking in at least six different languages at different times, and at the same time, the participants are talking about experiences that seem to be very important to them all.

Trude

We have agreed that I will start off the interview. It is important to me to try to create a reassuring atmosphere. I feel grateful and humble that the participants have taken the trouble and time to come here and talk with us. I want to show that we truly appreciate this. Two of the women have their children with them. I am thinking about how it was to be a mother of young children and how difficult it can be to get things done with children around you. The feeling that you, your attention and body, need to be everywhere, all at once. I try to express an understanding for that and that we want to conduct the interview in a flexible way that can work for all of us in the room.

When the interview finally starts after we have completed all the formalities, I find myself deeply emotionally affected. This is not just due to the actual *content* of what the participants are sharing, but all the more, simply because of being present in this myriad of languages that shapes the communication. Six different languages, in addition to the mixture of Norwegian and English that is buzzing in my head. I have never experienced anything like this. It is so intense, and yet, so calm and peaceful.

Preceding the interview, I had wondered what it would be like to conduct a focus group with so many different languages. As the conversation progresses, it occurs to me that this *is* actually a focus group and not just an "interview with many people"—the participants are communicating with each other, they build on each other's statements and something new arises. At least that was how I experienced it.

The stories become more personal and emotional; something is happening in this room. An intense sense of presence. I cannot fully express in words what that "something" is. To me, the young man serves as a manifestation of this development. At the beginning of the conversation, he was very quiet and spoke with a low voice, uttering few words. He showed a little expression and most of the time he looked down. As the conversation progressed, he spoke more, his voice became stronger and he smiled and expressed his emotions. He straightened up and had a lot on his mind. For me, being present is a poignant experience.

Like so many times before, I am struck by the power of interview situations. Something happens with us human beings when our experiences are sought. One of the participants says, "We know nothing, we wait for nothing. We just feel that we are here for nothing." I feel pain and inadequacy. What is the worth of having one's story witnessed? If someone hears your voice, your stories, your suffering—that most mean something. It ought to have some worth, or else, what right do I have to ask these people their stories? I am filled with mixed emotions. I feel grateful and honored to be part of this powerful encounter. However, I also feel ashamed, ashamed of coming from one of the richest countries in the world and of how I, in my daily life, am so preoccupied with myself. I come here and have nothing to offer. Nothing except lending an ear. I feel enriched and yet so small.

The participants thank us, and we thank them. I carry the experiences from this interview with me in the following days. I think about the participants, what they have experienced, about what happened between them and between us, about how they are doing now. About my own life. About how fragile it all is. How it does not make sense to think about them as them. They are us.

Marit

I remember this as a very intense and powerful encounter. It took some time before we got the focus group going. There were papers to be found and copied up for all the participants. Papers to be gone through and signed. Some people came early and were waiting patiently. Some more were expected. There were children. It was hot. I remember getting a bit restless and Trude and I asked if those who were there wanted something to drink. We found some glasses and a jug of water. A little girl around 3–4 years old wanted to get to know us strangers a bit. I said to her in English: "Would you like to have a look at these toys?" Well, knowing she did not understand I pointed to the toys in a corner beside me. She hesitantly came over—looking at her mother and looking back at me. The mother smiled and nodded, and her daughter slowly moved over. The little girl helped in bringing us in the room more together as a group. We became focused on the child and her everyday-life presence and playfulness. Bengt has described the situation with formal consent earlier. I remember one of the men being very concerned about anonymity. He asked in his native language: "Will this be safe? How can we be sure about this anonymity?" I remember thinking the following: how can we assure him and the others about this? Being aware of the humiliating ways many of the people in the room had been treated, all broken promises and all disappointing events during their last years, the understandable distrust, I felt uncomfortable. How could we convey the need for these western research ethics? We did our best in informing very concretely in the various languages and responding to issues raised. During this process of translations and clarifications, I was also worried about how it would all work with the variety of languages and people and, in this context, where we were going to talk about painful experiences. All together six languages. I was thinking we need to simply sit quietly and let things happen. Not to rush things. Trude started off in a very inviting and human way by thanking everyone for meeting us. She emphasized that it was very helpful for the EPAPSY team to learn about their experiences and thoughts in order to develop the practice.

It was very powerful to hear their stories. In a way, I could see and feel some of the pain they expressed through their voices and faces. One man had tears in his eyes. One woman had a very low and monotonous voice in describing the journey across the sea in an overcrowded boat where some of the passengers drowned. I was thinking this is so painful that she can hardly find strength to verbalize it.

I became so unhappy about the unfairness that fellow human beings had so much pain and so little hope for future improvement. I also felt upset and mad about the way other countries and our politicians in Norway leave Greece to deal with the refugee situation alone. We simply close our borders. Various emotions were affecting me.

We learned about specific experiences of general health and welfare services in Greece. Meetings with dentists, general practitioners (GPs), and health centers. The participants described how they were rejected because they did not speak Greek. Although the health services in Greece are obliged to use language apps that are free to download, they refuse people in need of help. The participants felt unsafe, isolated, and in continuous distress. They described in great detail the problems of language and lack of cultural mediators.

I also remember the man Trude and Bengt described earlier. The intensity in his voice, the seriousness, the hopelessness in the words in some of his sentences. He talked with deep concentration about the journey to Greece. He said, "I need help to live and deal with all the memories and experiences I have been through. Many of us in this room need help with these traumas." I still remember his face.

Reflections on reflections

Trude

When I read our reflections earlier, a question came to my mind. Why did I become a researcher? I hope and believe it was to find out things that can slightly improve some parts of the world (Thorneycroft, 2020), and to "trouble the world" (Klevan et al., 2019). I am often afraid of losing these guiding ideas and the hope that what I do can make a difference. Not to me personally, but to the people that contribute to my research, people that may be suffering in various ways and whose human rights are frequently violated. The focus in academia on production, publication points, and receiving external research funding is a constant threat to free and critical research and personal integrity as a researcher. It is also somewhat of a paradox. When I engage in research like the current project and disseminate it through papers and oral presentations, I add to my portfolio as a researcher. It "counts." I benefit from it personally as it enhances my career and perhaps my ego. But for whom and for what reasons should we do research (Moriarty, 2019)? How can we do research for the "right reasons," in terms of attempting to make something better for its own sake? Not for the sake of academia or my own career? Is a combination of both, a win-win situation, most desirable or is that an illusion? I fear that the two aspects, "doing good" on one hand, and "what counts" on the other hand, can become so entangled that they are difficult to distinguish. This is also related to how research ethics often seem to be limited to procedural ethics such as informed consent and confidentiality. For the members of the focus group, the procedural aspects appeared to be of limited interest. The opportunity to be heard was what mattered the most. In this way, denying someone a voice because of assumed fragility can also be unethical.

I wonder how I can be an ethical researcher. Perhaps, allowing ourselves to be moved and to create and share other stories can be one way of maintaining focus on what we believe matters the most. The research stemming from this project certainly did not and should not end with the published research report (Blinded, 2020). It still stays with me. The voices of the participants seem to have entered my voice (Frank, 2010). As qualitative researchers, we are still

generally advised to keep ourselves in the periphery of the research, to draw a line between "us" and "them" and to focus on the voices of the participants. And yet, if we consider development of knowledge as dialogic and co-created, it is difficult to overlook how the voices of the other evoke and invoke new voices in me. I cannot think about this research, this setting, without being emotionally affected and feeling that it is calling on me, that it calls for action. Perhaps, it is our duty as researchers to keep it alive, to critically investigate and reflect on it further? Perhaps, the other stories are as important as the original ones. Glesne (2007) questions the idea of doing research to help us understand and suggests that the more she experiences, the more she wonders if she can ever fully understand anything. She poses the question of whether *solidarity* might be a better purpose for research. Is that a core issue of our other stories? A sense of solidarity rather than understanding? If that is true, then what next?

Bengt

I share Trude's reflections reflections on solidarity in academia and in research. At the same time, I am mostly concerned with how solidarity practices can manifest themselves and how we can develop solidarity in meetings with people, such as the focus group interview we have described in this article. I remember having two types of experience in the interview. First, I was very moved and touched when I heard what the different people had experienced when fleeing. It was powerfully emotional for me to be present and learn from their stories expressed in different languages. There was a polyphony of voices and languages in the room that moved me to joy at being able to be present and listen to the people's stories. In a way, it was not necessary for me to understand the different languages or words that were spoken. For me, it was more than enough to look at their body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, and gaze. I felt in a concrete sense that I was in the basic ethical position that Levinas proposes, the other's gaze and the ethical appeal that lies in the other's gaze and face (Levinas, 2007). I do not understand Levinas' concept of appeal as pleading. To me, the appeal invites and encourages me to see, listen, and to be engaged and moved.

However, I also felt a great deal of discomfort in the encounter. I felt extremely uncomfortable in my safe and predictable situation as a White man with a house, home, family, steady income, and living in one of the richest countries in the world. Yet, I was listening to people who were fleeing, in an insecure situation and lacking everything I have—because they were forced to leave their homes. I suddenly felt that I was taking part in a social game where I was supposed to be a friendly Western researcher who would understand when they talked about what they had been through. I cannot imagine how it must have felt for the father who had to choose between saving his little daughter or his wife during their escape by boat from Turkey to Greece. It is completely impossible for me to understand. I can try and have tried. It is not possible to grasp. What I can do is to meet the father, listen to his story as he can and wants to tell it. I can write about this, talk about it, support organizations that work with and for refugees and last but not least, discuss the inhuman injustice with friends, family, colleagues, and others. I think this can be an expression of a practice of solidarity that can also help me to be a decent person in our time. I can create a space for my solidarity through cursing, pain, and despair over how we can treat other human beings forced to leave their home country.

There IS injustice in the world—in the whole world—also in Norway. Injustice both nationally and internationally has become apparent during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In Norway, more than 400,000 people have been laid off from their jobs. There are over 100,000 Norwegian children living in what are referred to in our context as poor families (Karlsson et al., 2020a). Various voluntary organizations say that there are not enough charities to distribute food to everyone who needs it. In the world, hundreds of millions of people live on the brink of disaster, including hunger, poverty, unemployment, persecution, disease, and climate change. The UN estimates that 822 million people in the world today are starving, which equates to every ninth person. In addition to war and conflict, climate change and extreme weather are one of the main reasons behind the increase in global hunger and serious food crises. Around 70 million people in the world are fleeing. At the same time, adults and children, young and old people, write on sidewalks and on social media and say to each other: "It will be ok" or "Everything will be fine."

We need optimism—we need realism and we need solidarity. We already know that global injustice will create greater differences between people in Norway, in Europe, and in the world. The differences will be seen in people losing their jobs, their income, their role and place in society, their homes, their dignity, and their self-respect. We know that increased economic and social differences between people are not only revealed in income or material standard of living. They also show in our physical and mental health (Karlsson et al., 2020a). In order for "Everything will be fine" to become real, it is crucial that we show solidarity with each other both locally and globally. We need to be organized and work collectively and politically to ensure real solidarity nationally and internationally. We have no fellow human beings to lose—we are all part of a common earth and humanity. Welcome solidarity—long live solidarity!

Bengt and Trude

So. "Reflections on reflections." What is there left to be said? I would like to dwell on a couple of issues. First, the concept solidarity is complex and has several meanings and manifestations. Stjernø (2011) refers to the following four different aspects of solidarity that I find useful in our context. *The boundaries of solidarity*: who is included and who is excluded? *The foundation of solidarity*: is solidarity build on self-interest or community interest? Does solidarity spring out of our interaction with other people? Is the source found in ethics, in reason, in altruism, or in

empathy? *The goal of solidarity*: is it about social change, revolution or reform? Is it about creating harmony and social integration and overcoming class conflict and differences? *The degree to which collective interests pre-empt individual interest*: does solidarity imply that individuals should relinquish personal autonomy and freedom in order to secure collective interests?

Thinking back on the focus group interview and the people we spent a few hours with, I am particularly concerned about the potentials of solidarity that spring out of human interaction and people we happen to meet. How we can inspire each other to new understandings and actions. I wonder: could we have achieved more collective solidarity in the group? How could we in that specific situation as human beings brought our resources, experiences and skills together and mobilized some social action? How would that fit with the scientific work we were doing? Do we make our academic role more limited than it needs to be? There is a need for awakening both when it comes to the critical situation for refugees and asylum seekers as well as the academic role and our obligations to people in need. Small steps, as we see it, can lead to public attention, change, and social movements. Raising issues publicly, like talking and writing about the critical situation of fellow human beings, can be one small step for mankind.

Second, after recently reading a book chapter by Lykes (2001) about activist participatory research with Mayan women, I realize the need for deeper insights into the situation where people form societies deeply traumatized by war. Several of the people in the focus group had escaped from experiences of decades of war. They had grown up with war and terror. Many of these wars are internal struggles where also external forces and countries are involved. The terror of war and state-sponsored violence creates a situation of "normal abnormality" or "terror as usual" (Lykes, 2001). People are silenced and threatened by terror and fear. Many feel they have no other choice than to leave. Their leaving involves long and frightening journeys across seas and deserts. There were more narratives and stories to be told and dwelt on in the setting of the focus group. We heard some and I think the group context enabled the people to move from the personal challenges and pain to shared experiences. The silent voice of the young man that became stronger, the careful listening to each other, the common situation, the feeling of community. I wish we had had more time.

Just as Bengt and Trude have reflected, I was also aware of my "otherness." A White academic with a good salary. We could to some extent draw on previous experiences of evaluations in Greece with ROMTH. However, I felt helpless and useless at times. I wanted to help. Do something "real" and not simply ask questions and put on the voice recorder.

There are some serious problems with the present academic role. We somehow appear to be parts of a machinery called New Public Management where we as university staff "produce" students and scientific papers following a specific format. Why do we not get organized and say stop? Why do we (more or less) loyally follow systems and leaders who seem more loyal to the bureaucratic carousel than to solidarity with people in need? Where is the critical and free research?

A good colleague of ours, the philosopher Arne Johan Vetlesen (Henmo, 2020), claims that as government-funded academics, it is our responsibility and duty to speak out about what we see and learn about people and society. He challenges the typical academics who keep their ideas to seminar rooms and publications for the few. I agree.

Closing remarks

The idea of final remarks in a paper is often to formulate a kind of conclusion, to sum it all up, and provide a take-home message. The problem with such messages is that everything else in the paper can then be regarded as of little importance. Hopefully, in an unstructured and narrative paper like this, it might be possible for the readers to take home ideas and perspectives throughout the paper that they find of some use and interest. Maybe our thoughts and reflections can evoke emotions, anger and frustration about the unfairness, and lack of solidarity in the world. About the tendency to treat human experiences and despair as publishable "research data," without questioning "what's going on here" and "what next"? Some of the more traditional human and social science approaches can be criticized for providing understandings of others that emphasize difference, that preserve, deepen, or entrench the divide between "us" (e.g. researchers) and "them" (e.g. participants; Douglas and Carless, 2013). Approaches like autoethnography often aim to blur and trouble these differences by providing contexts that enable emotional engagement with shared stories and characters. Writing the paper as a "trio-ethnographic" dialogue inspired and challenged the three of us to include more of our various inner and outer voices and thus different sources of engagement. This article explores the voices and dialogues of the researchers. However, we would argue that it might be fair to assume that traces of the participants' voices could be present in our voices. We hope our article can evoke some emotions and maybe even encourage solidarity. Furthermore, we also hope it can inspire others to develop and explore their *other stories.* These may be other stories about us and them, or about research and its purposes. Stories that may offer other forms of knowledge and insights. From a dialogic standpoint, meaning is not a stable concept that resides in the mind or words of a single person. Rather, it emerges in the interfaces between stories, people, and contexts (Harter, 2009). Thus, narratives and knowledge are something we *do*. In closing, our thoughts go back to the focus group meeting and the words of a woman who valued the opportunity for a safe space where she could express and talk freely about her traumatic experiences as a refugee: "I was feeling comfortable and I was desperate to tell. And I was feeling happy because I had someone to speak to, and I could tell whatever I had inside."

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