

ON REFUGEES, RESEARCHERS, VIRUSES, DATA, AND HOW THEY AFFECT EACH OTHER. A POST-QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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This article discusses the possibilities that post-qualitative inquiry can offer to the psychology of work and organizations and its methodological and ethical implications for research. It does so through the example of how changes in the socio-historical context of the researchers (i.e., the Covid-19 pandemic) can affect the analysis of empirical data. We (re)analyzed two vignettes, part of a large ethnographic study aimed at exploring practices and discourses of integration in two refugee reception centers in Italy. The empirical analysis shows how the process of knowledge production can be erratic and unpredictable, evolving through the encounter of multiple fields of information such as data, theories, researchers' experiences, and methods within the socio-historical-cultural background in which the inquiry is conducted. By embedding the (re)analysis in these changing sources of information, we show how it is possible to produce new knowledge from old/new data within a changed context in time and space.

Keywords: Post-qualitative methodologies; Organizational ethnography; Covid-19; Migrants; Research reflexivity.

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Today I woke up feeling like I have a weight on my chest, as if my ribcage has become smaller, less spacious. The air I breathe in is not enough, I want more. I hate this feeling. I'll try again. Nothing. I can't breathe more than this. Am I sick? Should I do some research on the internet? No, it's better not, I already know what would happen if I do, I would diagnose myself with some deadly disease. I have always suffered from anxiety, but right now, years after the last panic attack, I was not expecting it. It shouldn't be a surprise, after all we are right in the middle of a pandemic. It must be the Coronavirus; they say the main symptom is the shortness of breath. There was probably someone sick on that bus last week, I touched the handles, I pressed that filthy stop button. Then I smoked a cigarette just after leaving the bus. It must have gone this way. I have been smoking since I was 18 and this disease affects the lungs. If I get sick, I am done. I knew I should have quit with cigarettes. I can quit now. Yet, I'm thinking of smoking a cigarette now. No, maybe it's better if I don't. But I don't have any fever, I'm not sick. Should I do some meditation? I doubt it will work. Still, I can't breathe like yesterday. Am I really sick? What would happen to Alessandra? She will be forced to lock herself in our room for fifteen days with me. I don't want her to lose her job because of me. Then our housemates. I don't want to cause them problems.

I have to keep calm; I have to forget this damn virus, but everyone only talks about the pandemic. In Italy the virus is spreading, the contagions are increasing exponentially and the deaths as well. In my Facebook feed, I only read about coronavirus, coronavirus, coronavirus. I should avoid social media; I have to finish my thesis. But I can't write; the more I try, the less I write. I can't breathe, I try to expand

my lungs beyond the limits of my ribs, in search of some more precious oxygen. Now my chest hurts, I definitely have to relax, my heart's pounding. I'm sitting at my desk, staring at the screen. For how long? Minutes? Hours? I don't know. Maybe some music will help me, it usually does, but I can't stand any music today. I can't stand the silence either. I remember this feeling, it's just a panic attack, like that time, driving my car, when I felt like I was looking at the world through a screen. And now again, my vision is narrowed, and the room oppresses me. It is smaller than usual, like my ribcage. The ceiling is lower, and it is warmer than usual. Little space, little air. How long are we going to stay inside this house? This room is turning into a dreary cage, I have to keep calm (Marco, personal communication, 19 March 2020).

In this article we analyze two vignettes from a six months ethnographic study conducted in two Italian refugee reception centers between April 2017 and July 2018, adopting a post-qualitative research approach. The original study examined discourses and practices of integration within two Italian Refugee Reception Centers. In this article, however, we self-reflect on a small set of data to show how knowledge production is a process that evolves through encounters with theory and events, within multiple times and spaces. The analysis we report is, thus, used to grasp the possibilities for multiple movements of the same data, depending on how the relations between the researched, the researcher(s), and the data are affected by the specific time and space.

Following the (anti-)methodology outlined by Jackson and Mazzei (2012), we illustrate how data adapts to time and space and can be unsettled and unsettling. A post-qualitative research approach is not a methodology as such, nor it is a paradigm; instead, it has been viewed as a "methodology-to-come" (Lather, 2013, p. 635) and as an approach that questions the privileging of knowledge (Le Grange, 2018). It allows to escape the "golden cage of analytical procedures" and develop a multilayered analysis by "plugging-in" data, theory, methods, and the researcher's becoming to create new knowledge, in a new time and a new space (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 2). Through assemblage, these sources of knowledge dynamically transform each other and are transformed by the researchers who work with them, in the specific socio-historical moment. The product of these encounters is a partial depiction of the studied phenomenon, erratic and in continuous metamorphosis. Starting with the assumption that qualitative analysis is a process that involves the researcher's mind and body, the data transform, flowing toward new directions within different contexts, times, and spaces.

Marco (the first author) conducted the empirical research as part of his PhD programme, the embodied reflections are, thus, Marco's lived analysis. The article, however, was written with Cinzia (the second author), who not only contributed to the first part but also questioned Marco's reflective knowledge, offering her own feelings and writing style to the ethnographic notes. We started writing this article in March 2020, (re)analyzing data we previously analyzed for a conference paper in 2019. However, we are now in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. As of May 20th, 2020, the total number of Covid-19 cases amount to more than 4.89 million, distributed in over 188 countries. The death toll has exceeded 323,000, while more than 1.68 million people have recovered (Center for Systems Science and Engineering [CSSE], 2020). This current situation has provided alternative views and embodied insights about us and the data. It has, therefore, allowed us to reflect and discuss the methodological implications of changes to the socio-historical context within which the analysis took place. Consequently, we highlight the methodological and creative potentials of post-qualitative research for the development of richer methods of inquiry that are grounded in the socio-historical-cultural context. The article is organized as follows. Firstly, we set out the contexts within which the data was produced — the refugee crisis of the last few years — and ana-

lyzed in two different times — pre and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Secondly, we discuss the possibilities offered by post-qualitative methodologies for the study of work and organizations and suggest that the current coronavirus crisis (as an example) produced new reverberations affecting our encounter with previously produced data. We then present the data analysis, and the conclusive discussion of the article's contribution.

FROM ONE CRISIS TO ANOTHER

The biographical note opening the article was written a week after the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of Covid-19 a global pandemic. Italy was in lockdown since the middle of March and the United Kingdom, one of the last European countries to implement restrictive measures, enforced a lockdown at the end of March. The health security measures enforced by many governments across the world had the aim to stop the spread of the coronavirus but have also drastically reduced financial activities, determining the onset of an ongoing global recession, the extent of which is still far from clear (Zhang et al., 2020). The pandemic exposed the deficiencies of many national health services (Douglas, et al., 2020) and affected the medical professionals — addressed as “heroes” by popular media — in high numbers (Adams & Walls, 2020), with approximately 10% of healthcare professionals infected worldwide (Lacina, 2020). The pandemic continues to have implications for many people as they deal with health and financial issues but also with mental health, domestic violence, drugs and alcohol abuse (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020; Priola & Pecis, 2020).

These events are at the forefront of our minds as we are writing about another emergency, the refugee crisis. We could not help ourselves from thinking about how the images of the pandemic have replaced those of the refugees landing on Mediterranean shores in large numbers in the last few years. The 2015 mass displacement of people from war affected countries and poorer nations developed into a humanitarian crisis, affecting European politics and national and international debates (Korkut et al, 2013). During the last 10 years, the growth of migration flows has become increasingly salient within political agendas and public discourse of many European countries (Carvalho & Ruedin, 2020). Since 2010, following conflicts and uprisings that have destabilized the geopolitical balance of northern Africa and Middle East, the wave of individuals fleeing their countries has gradually increased (Mulack, 2016). In 2016, around four million Syrians abandoned their homes and other six million were internally displaced without any place to go (Mulack, 2016). At that time, the countries adjoining Syria were hosting almost five million refugees (Achilli, 2016; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2017). Lebanon, Bangladesh, and Turkey, the world top three refugee hosting countries, responded to the flow of mass migration by gradually closing borders and introducing tougher policies, limiting refugees' rights and opportunities (Achilli, 2016; Al-Qdah & Lacroix, 2011). Consequently, a million and a half people requested protection in Europe, whose measures to manage the arrivals, identify asylum seekers and guarantee their protection proved to be inadequate (Bernhard & Kaufmann, 2018; Pries, 2019).

Concurrently, in 2015, more than 500,000 migrants from Africa reached Southern Europe undertaking a dangerous travel through the Mediterranean Sea (Holmes & Castaneda, 2016). In 2017 the UNHCR reported that there were 71.4 million people displaced across the world (UNHCR, 2018), of these, 25 million are Africans. Migrants and refugees¹ have been represented by social and political discourses as subjects in need of care as well as potential threats (Moreno-Lax, 2018), depending on political allegiances and agendas. The condition of refugees closely resemble the *xenos* (ξένος a Greek word meaning

“stranger”), the “foreigner outsider” denoting both “enemy” and “friend” (Curi & Giacomini, 2002), and recalling emotional experiences of *unheimlich* (Freud, 1919/1977), “uncanny,” strangely familiar, yet mysterious, unsettling eerie.

The migrant recalls the soulless slave, the savage, the subject whose existence depends on the white man, modern, and rational. Yet they evoke a condition to which we are all potentially exposed. The migrant awakens the ancestral fear of losing one’s souls, freedom, and autonomy. As Agamben (1995) explains, we are all potentially *homines sacri* and we can all be potentially abandoned, sacrificed, casted out. We do not want to be reminded of this. And this is the reason why we dehumanize and try to control refugees. This is the reason why our societies try to rationalize their condition, as we detach ourselves from “them.” They awaken the fear of a condition we are potentially exposed to, something that vaguely touched us during the ongoing pandemic. We had a taste of what it means to lose our liberty, our certainties for the future. We felt weak and breakable in front of something greater than us (albeit less devastating than war or persecution).

POST-QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: OPPORTUNITY OR THREAT FOR ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

From a research perspective the refugee crisis represented a possibility to comprehend the causes and effects of forced migration, as researchers across the world aimed to better understand politics and practices of integration and ultimately help to improve the lives of vulnerable migrants (e.g., Joppke, 2017; Korkut, et al., 2013; Valtonen, 2016). From an organizational psychology perspective, we became interested in the organizing of integration and, in particular, in the policies and practices of those organizations that support the integration of refugee within the host society. The wider research from which the data for this article derive, was planned and carried out as a qualitative, ethnographic study, in which the researcher immersed himself into the daily work of two different refugee reception centers. Organizational ethnographies are not that common in organizational psychology; however, their popularity is growing in other sister disciplines such as management and organization studies and sociology of work. Ethnographic approaches are considered an invaluable instrument to unfold the intricacy of organizational life, the implicit paradigms used to give sense to daily life, and explore the dynamics guiding the processes of subjects’ constitution (see Ybema et al., 2009).

The field of qualitative research in general and participatory methods, in particular, has been characterized by a shared rejection of “mainstream” quantitative research methods (Schwandt, 2000) and an association to an interpretivist epistemology (Le Grange, 2018). Without delving into the details of the benefits and limitations of the postmodern and the linguistic and discursive turns in critical psychology (see Parker, 2002), interpretivist and discursive psychological perspectives have, for example, forced a re-thinking of notions of unitary self-hood or identity and problematized links with wider socio-political issues that have often been neglected by perspectives focusing on the individual. More recently there have been limited attempts within critical psychology to open-up connections to political critique (Parker, 2002).

In addition, interpretivism and qualitative research have also been accused of failing to distance themselves from the positivist conventions they originally challenged (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013), remaining trapped as the alternative to positivism. Interpretivism is generally reported as one part of the positivist-interpretivist dualism, with all the problematics associated to dualisms. Interpretivism is the “non-other” of epistemology, it comes to be defined in opposition to positivism and, thus, it lacks independence from it. It also acquires its meaning within other dualisms, “such as objectivity versus subjectivity, fixed categories

versus emergent categories, the outsider's perspective versus the insider's perspective, a static reality versus a fluid reality, and explanation versus understanding" (Howe, 1992, p. 239). Until we manage to break the positivist-interpretivist dualism, we will remain anchored to strict research conventions that prevent us from exploring more creative and, potentially, empowering methodologies.

More recently, scholars such as Benozzo (2018), Gherardi (2019), Lather, (2016), and St. Pierre (2013) have expressed concerns with the monolithic, logocentric aspects of interpretivist research, as well as the erosion of its radical spirit and commitment to "produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently" (St. Pierre, 1997, p.175). Simultaneously, poststructuralist and posthuman interrogations have brought to the fore the limitations of social constructionism, with its prominence given to language and anthropocentric discourse at the expenses of more material "realities." To fit with new materialism and the critique of "post" theoretical approaches (i.e., posthumanism, postcolonialism, etc.), a range of methodological approaches are currently emerging to disrupt the standardization, normalization, and "scientification" of qualitative research (Gerrard et al., 2017, p. 385). Post-qualitative methodologies encompass a variety of approaches, but while respecting the "ethico-onto-epistemological" principles of their theories of reference (Barad, 2007), they have in common the unsettling of reality, knowledge, truth, rationality, and the research subject. In short, they defy the basic assumptions of the humanist tradition (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000), proposing "methodologies without strict boundaries or normative structures [...] that might begin anywhere, anytime [and that] can create a sense of uncertainty and loss [...]" (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016, p. 1). As Carlson et al. (2021) suggest, post-qualitative inquiry "calls *not* for a new or alternative methodology but for a re-engagement with post-structural critique." The aim is to experiment with theories, data, and methods by transcending the boundaries of conventional qualitative inquiry.

ANALYZING DATA AS A SERIES OF UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTERS

Between 2017 and 2018, Marco spent six months volunteering in two Italian refugee reception centers hosting migrants with international protection and supporting their social integration. During that time, he assisted employees in routine activities, supported meetings between migrants, staff members, and local communities by acting as English/Italian interpreter, and helped migrants in carrying out various daily tasks (e.g., medical visits and sorting out documents). The analysis we present below is based on the ethnographic data produced in this environment, where Marco participated to the organizational life, interacting with workers and migrants informally and formally through interviews. Accordingly, we will present two ethnographic vignettes to illustrate how data can transform and embody the *unheimlich* to become "new data" following specific events affecting both research and researchers.

In line with Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) "hinking with theory approach," we put the *unheimlich* concept "at work" to guide our re-reading of the old/new data. We see the *unheimlich* as a nonconcept, for its erratic nature "on the verge between concept and affect, between theory and art, between genuine thinking and blocs of sensation" (Masschelein, 2011, p. 11). The *unheimlich* evokes the "unsettling feelings of unpleasantness" stemming from the encounter with something usual that suddenly appears frightening to the observer (Beyes, 2019, p. 182). Freud (1919/1977) clarifies that the disquietude and the disturbing element of the *unheimlich* lays in the unexpected "return" of something familiar that had (symbolically or otherwise) disappeared. In our case, the same data produced between 2017 and 2018 and analyzed in 2019, appeared different and *unheimlich* to us when we came back to it in 2020. The anxiety described at the beginning of this paper portrays the encounter with the *unheimlich* during the pandemic.

By abandoning the idea of data as fixed and stable, toward a view of data “in movement” with the researchers (Benozzo et al., 2013), it is possible to appreciate how known data can become unknown and, depending on the context in which they are analyzed, “old” data can become “new.” Benozzo and Gherardi (2019, p. 150) used the concept of *unheimlich* to describe the so-called “wondrous or disorienting data” and the struggles with “not-yet data.” Our goal is to portray our relationship with “old” data that we thought we knew but that, following a period of time seemed different to us. Extending Benozzo and Gherardi’s work (2019) we use the aesthetics of the *unheimlich* to conceptualize what we should call the “yet-again data”: still, afresh, once more data.

As we re-analyzed the data for this article our lives have been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. Forced to remain at home in lockdown for approximately three months, we had to face the impossibility of living alternative spatialities and physicalities as we were used to. As we renounced to a portion of our social life to safeguard the integrity of ours and other’s life, we realized that our prospects, perceptions, and viewpoints affected the way we related to the data. A new assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) came into being, constituted by us (the researchers), the refugees (speaking to us through the data), and the virus, which regulated the relations between the parts and the local conditions of possibility. The new scenario in which we are living, filled with intense and destabilizing emotions, offered us the opportunity to read the data in a new way. As Benozzo et al. (2013, p. 314) state “data is not distinct from us: instead the data appear to absorb us and shift its form to accommodate our own teasing and worrying of it.” Thus, by letting the data merge with theory and interfere with our existence, we took part in this new unexpected assemblage “in becoming” (Deleuze, 1990) that helped us to grasp something new about the research methods and ourselves.

In the empirical data analysis below, we alternate the use of “I” with “we” to reflect that the resulting analysis is a collaborative effort between both authors. However, it is not possible to define exactly who lies behind the “I,” since the drafting has progressed continuously and actively involving both of “us.” The text bounced between the two of us and, excluding the ethnographic accounts, the rest of the article is the product of a joint work conducted together. It is therefore natural to ask: who is the author of the article? The answer is both and neither of us. Despite the autoethnographic flavor, this is not a tale about speaking subjects, but a vibrant story of encounters in different planes of existence. As Deleuze and Parnet (1977/1987) would say, this work took shape in the intermediate and precarious space between our subjectivities and other deterritorialized entities and characters that could not write for themselves, gathering all together in the pages of this article.

Vignette 1: An Embodied Reconnection with the Participants’ Stories

Simon: [...] I was born in 1998 and the war started in 1991 in the eastern part of the country. The war between the civilians and the government lasted about twelve years [...] The rebels attacked the village where I was born; they killed my father [...] when the war finished my mother was taking care of me, my brothers and the rest of the family [...] we are farmers. Then in 2014 we had an outbreak of Ebola; you know that disease?

Researcher: Yes, I’ve read something. There was the fear that it could also spread to Europe.

Simon: [...] At that time, they banned us, we could not travel. The government put a state of emergency and they closed schools, banned gatherings, nothing was going on at that time. At that time when this happened, we never experienced such kind of disease, it was the first time and people did not believe what

[the government] was saying; people should have stopped washing the [clothes in the river]. If someone got sick or died it was forbidden to touch them. So, the sickness started spreading in the eastern part of the country, then in May 2014 it took over the all country [...] people started dying and one of our neighbors got sick. My mother went there to visit that person and got infected [...] after one week she started feeling sick. At that time there was a number to call if you had a sick person [at home].

Researcher: Like an emergency number?

Simon: Yes. So, we called the number to tell that our mum was sick, so they came and took us to the hospital. They did the test; they said we had been affected by Ebola. At that time if they found out that you were sick, they put you in quarantine. So, they quarantined us, they took us to the hospital, they treated us but unfortunately my mother died...

Researcher: I'm sorry...

Simon: It was a horrible time for us . . . not only for me and for us, but for Sierra Leone. So many people died in that outbreak. I lost two of my brothers and one of my aunts [...] When the Ebola outbreak finished, and the government was able to tackle it, [I decided to leave]. You know in Africa if you have a problem, everybody knows that. Everyone looks at you with that kind of eyes, despising you. Especially that kind of problems; everybody is scared of you. They avoid you. If you go to the field to play ball with them, they will not allow you to play; they will not allow you to do anything with them. I said to them that because of what happened to me and my family, they started treating me like I wasn't here [...] then I decided to leave that community, the community where I was born...

The interview with Simon, an extract of which is presented above, represented a key event in the research project. It was one of the first interviews part of an empirical project I conducted entirely on my own. I was testing a new (to me) approach to conduct the interviews as open dialogues, "conversations with a purpose" (Burgess, 1984, p. 102) and there I was, with a person I barely knew and a recorder defining our roles and the boundaries of our interactions. I remember preparing myself for these interviews by reading as much as possible. I was concerned of not being able to relate to the migrants because of my privileged background as a white, able-bodied, heterosexual, educated Italian man. Our stories were so different. We were both migrants (as I was living in England), but our conditions were certainly not comparable. How could I comprehend their experiences?

At their age I had had everything I needed; I had the opportunity to study, to have a decent life, and to live my youth without major problems. Of course, I went through moments of inner struggles, I made mistakes, I cried, I lost loved ones, I suffered, but that was nothing compared to being born in a country at war and being affected by a pandemic. I remember the sense of unease I felt before that interview. My personal and professional "inexperience" made me feel uncomfortable. I had already talked informally with Simon, but this time it was different, it was a formal event that had to be recorded. I was concerned about my imperfect English, the appropriateness of my questions, his possible answers. In doing so, I kept in mind Hammersley and Traianou's advice (2014) that "a researcher's primary responsibility is to pursue the task of research well, and that this also requires the exercise of autonomy" (p. 227). There I was first and foremost a researcher. With the benefit of hindsight and during the data analysis, it became clear that I rigidly interpreted Hammersley and Traianou's position at that time, giving too much centrality to the task of "doing research well."

Even before we spoke, I noticed Simon's green eyes that expressed sorrow. A reminder of his journey through pain, loss, and deprivation. He was not very loquacious; he was introverted, shy, and sensitive. I started the interview by asking about his story; I wanted to ensure that he felt free to talk to me about what mattered to him. He first spoke about Sierra Leone, then he talked about the war. This excerpt took place

within the first 10 minutes of our conversation. He had been in Italy only a few months. As we talked, he became emotional, he stammered; I was afraid he would burst into tears, but he went on without adjourning, like he could not stop. I remember thinking: “what do I do now?” Meeting his suffering deeply destabilized my knowledge and my understanding of doing research well. I remember asking myself: What does “good research” mean in such a situation? Should a good researcher stop Simon and ask if he needs a break? I decided to remain silent and listen to his words, as they slowly painted a dramatic scenario on the canvas of my mind. I was listening to the tragic events lived by this man, while aware of my own needs as well as my professional limits.

When writing the draft paper, almost a year ago, we analyzed the data focusing on Simon’s suffering and how it was used to construct a personal history that fit with the identity of the refugees in need of protection. Simon’s story, in his authenticity, also served the purpose of building an “appropriate story” of suffering and vulnerability necessary to obtain the protection status that allows him to remain in Italy. The same narrative contributes to his identity work and will also determine his future relations and interactions (Manocchi, 2014; Pizzorno, 2007). We argued that the refugees’ suffering, their emotional needs and their human dignity contribute to construct them as psychological subjects in need of help (De Vos, 2013). However, as highlighted by De Vos (2013) “this psychologizing discourse also locks them up in their victimhood and blocks the way for people to react subjectively and politically” (p. 100). During the various interviews conducted with the migrants, I felt that they recounted their experiences as if they were rehearsing a script, with certain elements strategically placed and repeated, especially the most tragic ones.

The paradoxical effect of their detachment and simultaneous display of emotions (e.g., detached voice accompanied by tearful eyes), and the facility with which they told their dramatic experiences to an almost unknown person, puzzled us as we attempted to analyze the interviews, questioning the effects of such process of narrative composition. Clearly, by recalling the experiences that led them to abandon their countries, Simon and the other migrants were re-awakening their suffering during the interviews. However, in the first narrative analysis we completed we remained focused on their apparent detachment, on the result of de-subjectification (Agamben, 1998) through which they were able to rationally and accurately describe their tragic experiences. Coming back to Simon’s interview several months after the first analysis and during the Covid-19 pandemic we could read different stories. Our encounter with the virus created a new assemblage that allowed us to plug-in these new experiences, theories, and data (and thus Simon) to re-analyze that “detachment.” During the interview I could feel Simon’s suffering, still there was no closeness between us, we were on two different dimensions. At first, I attributed his detachment to the introjection of the relational injunction according to which migrants must confess their “truth” in front of social workers and migration officials (Lorenzini & Tazzioli, 2018). I thought he was just repeating the same story for the umpteenth time in front of a representative of the reception center. However, as I was so concerned with ensuring that I conducted a “good” interview, I now realize that it was me who maintained the “professional” distance. When he told me about his losses to Ebola, I just said a timid “I’m sorry.”

As I re-read his interview during the lockdown, going over his story again, it is almost as if it is the first time that I realized that he lost his mother, two brothers and his aunt to the Ebola virus. He was alone and he was a survivor. I have not lost any loved ones to Covid-19 but I am afraid to catch it, I am afraid for my mother who lives alone in Italy while I am in England, unsure about when I will be able to see her again. I feel his feelings as if I am much closer to him now than I was then, when I sat in front of him. Instead of detachment, I now read shame and guilt in his story, the guilt of the survivor. The same guilt that Primo Levi describes in his poem entitled *The Survivor*:

[...] Get away from here, drowned people, go away. I didn't usurp anyone's place, I didn't steal anyone's bread, nobody died in my stead. No one. Go back to your mist. It isn't my fault if I live and breathe, eat and drink and sleep and wear clothes. (Levi, 1988, p. 581)

As Agamben (1998) explains, Levi's attempt to fight against the guilt caused by having survived the concentration camps shines through in this poem. This paradoxical condition determines an inner conflict escaping rational reasoning, a suffering connected with the sense of guilt for having survived while the others died. Within this new assemblage, Simon's story becomes a story of shame and guilt, guilt to be alive, shame for how he was treated by his friends and the members of his community. Simon decided to cross the desert, the prisons of Libya, the Mediterranean Sea, to reach Italy. This re-reading is also affecting my sense of detachment, which is now becoming guilt. As we are re-analyzing the interview for this article that we are writing during the lockdown, I feel a sense of guilt, guilty for my inability to relate to Simon, but also guilty for having moved to England to pursue further studies, for having left my friends and, above all, my mother, who lives alone following my father's death. I looked back at my diary and, reading the note reported in the opening to this article, I now see my anxiety and the breathing difficulties as connected to the fear of losing my loved ones, and to the sense of guilt for not being with them during this pandemic.

While I am not comparing my experience of the Covid-19 pandemic to Simon's experience of Ebola, it is through this present condition that I re-connect myself with Simon's story and give new meanings to his words. The (distant?) encounter with the coronavirus allowed me to explore "*unheimlich* elements of my personality" through the above data. The re-reading of the interview with a stranger called Simon, helped me to find the courage to dig deep inside me and meet the "stranger in myself" (Kristeva, 1991) that could destabilize my *molar* conceptions of personal and professional identity (Jackson, 2013). Before that, I was exercising control over my work, respecting the dominant norms concerning methodological praxis, rooted in the regimes of truth shaping the behaviors of the good researcher. In this second analysis, we are letting ourselves be carried away by the flux of data, resisting the systems of thought and the operations of power underlying the orthodox practices of social research. The data is guiding us toward novel connections and viewpoints, paving the way toward creative ways of doing research (Hammersley & Traianou, 2014).

Vignette 2: Questioning the Role of the Researcher in the Process of Data Analysis

The below is an extract from the field diary:

I arrived late that day. When I entered the office, I realized that something was happening. In another room, Beatrice, the project manager, was having a heated discussion with Albert, one of the migrants hosted by the center. After 10 minutes Beatrice left her office and asked me for help. I joined the meeting room with Beatrice. A big oval table in the middle of the room with 10 seats around. Beatrice sat at the extreme left of the table, with me on her right. Albert was sitting in front of me. At first, I was asked only to translate Beatrice and Albert's word. She explained to him the situation:

You arrived in Italy in 2015 and entered the center in August 2016. After 6 months [this is the specific funded time to support migrants' integration] you didn't make enough progress. We managed to secure you a three months extension. You should have finished in April 2017. It's May now and we're still providing you with a house and money. We tried to help you but I'm sorry your time has finished. You must leave the project. We cannot give you the money anymore and you must leave the apartment.

That's when things escalated. Albert started shouting: "You have to help me. I'm a human being, you're abandoning me, you don't care about me. If you send me away, I don't have any place to go. You only care about the business and the money". It was difficult to talk to him, he was yelling, accusing Beatrice of betraying him. I managed to calm him down. I explained to him that he had to leave not because they didn't care about him but because they must comply with the rules according to which, after the extension, guests must leave the center. Rapidly my role changed from translator to mediator. Beatrice talked to him through me and Albert talked to her through me. Suddenly they started arguing again. I managed to calm him down. Beatrice told me that he is an extremely anxious guy and that they tried to help him, but he wasn't committed: "We cannot find him a job or a house. He wasted his time. In two years, he didn't even learn Italian."

Beatrice left the room leaving me with Albert. He started speaking about his concerns. He was afraid that he would be forced to go back to Africa. He said that he was a good guy that wanted to find a job. He said that the refugee reception system doesn't help them and sometimes migrants have to act illegally to survive. He said he was fighting for his rights because he received international protection status. I tried to explain that the organization wasn't against him but that, conversely, they wanted to help him. Trying to create a stronger empathic connection, I talked about my experience in the UK and that I had to prove that I'm a good research student to keep my position. I said that we must be responsible and that he couldn't speak about himself only as a "victim." After two hours, I was able to convince him to relax and trust the social workers. Beatrice came back saying that they would help him to renew the residential permit, but he had to leave the project: "Now you can go, we are doing our best, but you are no longer in the position to pretend anything from us." He left the facility without saying anything. I was exhausted, Beatrice looked at me saying that this is the worst part of their job. (Fieldnote, 17 May 2017)

This event took place on the third day in the field; I was keen to establish a good relationship with the organization. That day I had the opportunity to prove that I could be useful and not just "the observer," as I was sometimes addressed as by few of the employees. Access does not stop at the moment of entering the field, but it can be preserved (or lost) according to the quality of the relationships with organizational members (Yanow, 2012). Beatrice needed an English-speaker and nobody, except me, could speak English. It was the perfect situation to earn the trust of my co-workers and meet one of the migrants. I was asked to translate the conversation, but I was aware of my lack of knowledge about the specific situation and circumstances of the meeting. Moreover, as I could not take notes, I was concerned with keeping the details of the event to memory as I wanted to note its minutiae in the field-diary (the field notes above were compiled at the end of the day).

Despite the high levels of emotional involvement by all three subjects that were participating to the meeting, the first analysis focused on the distribution of power inside the room, Albert was both angry and sad, and his reaction escalated when he realized that he had to leave the center. I was also emotional and experiencing contradictory feelings. I felt unable to help him as well as sorry for him. Did the organization care about the migrants? Was it just a matter of bureaucratic rules or business priorities? Or maybe Beatrice was right, and Albert did not do his part. I felt pulled by both sides, with Albert trying to convince me that he was the victim and Beatrice trying to persuade me that they were doing their best, so that I could relay to him that he had to work harder at finding a job. I was asked to translate but I found myself negotiating a conflict. Our subjectivities as a destitute one, a manager and a researcher the others were both in the making in that room, and the power struggles between us was clearly evident.

Informed by poststructuralist theories, our initial analysis attempted to reveal the micro-manifestations of power/knowledge within the organizations and the technologies of power employed to shape migrants' subjectivities (Foucault, 1982, 1988). We were not searching for "hidden meanings," rather we focused on the flows of power between the subjects; how Beatrice used me to convey her power to impose the organizational decision, how simultaneously Albert was transferring his power to me to challenge Beatrice's authority, and how I exercised expert power. Depending on how I translated what I was told, I could elicit different reactions in Albert and Beatrice; still during that meeting and for some time after, I was convinced I was somehow neutral and imposing neutrality on the meeting itself.

Organizational ethnographers view themselves as story tellers but often fail to place themselves at the center of the analysis. Likewise, I focused more on Beatrice and Albert's power struggle, however as we re-analyzed this vignette, I realized that I was more concerned with behaving correctly from a methodological point of view, disregarding that I was losing sight of my research objectives. In nourishing my subject position of "the exemplary ethnographer," I pushed myself toward detachment. My theoretical assumptions, while infused with a critical stance, supported my "analytical safe space" as I remained focused on the memories of Albert's rebellion and Beatrice's attempt to re-establish the hierarchies of power.

Processing the various "fields" of knowledge of theory, the data, and new interpretations (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 2) emerged from the sharing of our different viewpoints as we write this article, we have achieved a new understanding. This encompasses the sense of anxiety and inadequacy experienced by Marco when he initially approached the data. The adoption of a post-qualitative approach, that forced a new assemblage that included the researcher as an integral component of the data, allowed an embodied and emotional re-connection to the data and to the study too. The first analysis preserved the legitimacy of the researcher as the project manager, hiding behind the curtain of conventional methodologies. In this second analysis we highlight that in an attempt to show an exemplar behavior as researcher in the making, Marco contributed to the social exclusion of Albert and to the creation of a *xenos*, a *homo sacer* (Agamben, 1995), existing in the threshold between exclusion and inclusion. We now interpret the attempt to convince Albert of the importance of being a good citizen though the use of Marco's own life example (i.e., "you must be a good student to earn your place in society") as an exercise of colonial power that further created exclusion. In an apparent conflict with the personal and professional critical approach and strong beliefs about social justice, we now see how Marco unwittingly used his power/knowledge position to safeguard his role of "good researcher" and accommodate the interests of the organization, depoliticizing Adam's act of resistance to further exclude him on the basis of an imperialist logic (Darling, 2014)

The new assemblage, thus, brought to light new connections, embodied feelings, and insights. These new understandings, emerged by re-reading the data during the pandemic, led also to further reflection of the role of the researcher as a privileged subject. During the coronavirus outbreak, we reconsidered our privileged conditions as we and our family continued to have a comfortable and safe place to stay during the lockdown. We continued with our professional and research activities, while others lost their jobs or their lives, or were forced to live in crowded accommodations (Dwivedi & Mohan, 2020). As Kluge et al. (2020) explains, migrants and refugees are particularly vulnerable, strongly affected by the negative impact of the pandemic and the lockdown. We now interpret Albert's request for continuous help as an act of resistance and a political act of expectation of basic human rights.

CONCLUSIVE DISCUSSION

In this paper we retraced how our analysis has transformed before and after the Covid-19 pandemic, accompanying “our becoming-other-different,” both as researchers and individuals. Specifically, we showed how our “analytical safe distance” has been challenged by a re-reading of the data during the pandemic. The new awareness allowed us to self-reflect on our research approach and get closer and sensitive to the research participants’ perspective. As Carlson (2021) states, “the timing of writing projects is everything” (p. 159). We believe that also the “timing of doing analysis” is everything. As Deleuze (1990) states, becoming “eludes the presents” and “does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of [...] past and future” (p. 1). The very essence of “becoming” is thus connected to the simultaneous flow between past and future. Becoming is never fixed and, by fleeing the present, it attains to “the paradox of infinite identity” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 2). What we were is not anymore, and what we are is not going to be. This applies to us as much as it applies to the data. For this reason, our analysis has moved back and forth in time, to capture the current position; it will be visualized in a future in which this present has already passed. As data moves with us, the writing of the analysis offered a handhold to grasp, for just a brief time, as it continues to flow in the maelstrom of time and space.

Furthermore, we reflect on how the rejection of the “inconvenient” qualities of the data has led us to overlook the impact of Simon and Albert’s stories on our stories, eventually affecting the way in which we conducted the research, in terms of both positioning in the field and analysis of the data. By detaching ourselves from the data in the analysis and the writing we defied the flow of becoming, limiting the sophistication and possibilities of our work. However, as Jackson explains (2013) “becoming is a constant, fluid process of changes, interactions and transformations that work to destabilize *molar* forms and relations” (p. 117). Within Deleuzian theory, the concept of molarity is used in opposition to molecularity, to describe “something that is well-defined, massive and governing — such as large structures, or identity categories” (Jackson, 2013, p. 117). To guide our research practices and safeguard our professional (and personal) integrity, we found solace behind traditional methodologies and molar definitions of “good researchers” that shielded us against *unheimlich* and transgressive data (St. Pierre, 1997).

However, as we scrutinized the initial assemblage, realizing that a new one was emerging, we also understood how the commitment to follow methodological (qualitative) orthodoxy sustained the justification for the behavior in the field and the subsequent analytical approach. For Massumi (1992, as cited in Jackson, 2013), becoming is “directional (away from molarity), but not directed (no one body or will can pilot it); it is not intentional (p. 103). This imply that the process of becoming cannot be stopped. Jackson (2013) explains that “becoming happens in the middle of molar structures that break apart dichotomies that organize bodies, experiences, institutions and histories; the molecular is the effect of this breaking apart” (p. 120; see also, Sotirin, 2005). Our molar conceptions of ethnographic research and data analysis has been shattered by the arrival of the pandemic, ultimately dismantling the shelter built inside the structure of the conventional methods. Henceforward, we followed Carlson (2021, p. 159) invitation to embrace the disturbances inherent to the process of knowledge creation and dive into “the felt impressions of life-in-motion.” The embodied emotional instances occurring within everyday happenings and situations, allowed us to overcome the “interpretive imperatives, limiting the so-called analysis,” to produce new knowledge from the same body of data part of a new assemblage (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 262).

We concur with Denzin (2019, p. 721) who states that “as critical scholars, we need to find new ways of better connecting persons and their personal troubles with social justice methodologies.” Post-qualitative methodologies offered us a “safe space of uncertainty” to reflect upon our practices and re-

politicize them, supporting our becoming-diverse-other (Deleuze, 1990), as reflexive (ethical?) researchers and individuals. By following the movements of data through time and space in an embodied manner, we explored new ways for “doing research well” paying attention to how research practices (and life events) affect our lives and the lives of participants as well as our interpretations. We believe that the boundaries between personal and political life, research, theory, and method should collapse as “[research] is a practice that involves the whole person, continually drawing on past experience as it is projected into the future” (Ingold, 2011, p. 240,). We argue that by shredding those barriers and exceeding the limits of methodologies it is possible to self-reflect on one’s professional and personal responsibilities to creatively think about open-ended, alternative, embodied and affective research methods in work and organizational psychology (Gherardi, 2019). Such embodied and affective ontology supports the return to materialism (new materialism) in social research and facilitate a deep engagement with the intermediate space between the researcher and the material world in a (posthuman) context in which the human is not the only agentic subject at the center of the Universe.

NOTE

1. A refugee is a subject forced to flee his/her homeland because of war and direct persecution for reasons of race, religion, or nationality, famine or natural disaster. In this article we use the general term “migrant” to define a person who has left the country of origin to live in another country, including refugees and asylum seekers but it can also include economic migrants.

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