

9 Confessions of an ‘academic tourist’

Reflections on accessibility, trust, and research ethics in the ‘Grandhotel Cosmopolis’

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Introduction

This chapter discusses the challenges and consequences of over-research in the context of asylum seeker accommodation by examining the case of the Grandhotel Cosmopolis (GHC) in Augsburg, Germany. The project is an asylum seeker centre as well as a tourist hotel and describes itself as a ‘concrete utopia—realising a cosmopolitan everyday culture without limits where refugees, travellers, guests, artists and neighbours meet and are welcome’ (Grandhotel Cosmopolis 2014). The project received multiple prizes and attracted scores of journalists, artists, and student researchers since its opening in 2013. The chapter critically examines fieldwork undertaken at the height of the ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe between September 2016 and July 2017, as part of a PhD project. During the so-called refugee crisis, ‘doing something with refugees’ became fashionable in the fields of journalism, research, and political art. ‘Hot topics’ such as ‘refugee crisis’ may result in ‘over-research’, meaning an excessive research focus on certain communities, projects, and places (Neal et al. 2016). The chapter argues that over-research is strongly related to temporary forms of research engagements pursuing ‘hot topics’ in places that are comparatively easy to access. The case study of the GHC highlights that over-research might not only produce research fatigue but the consequences of over-research on social relations between academia and local organisations and groups may be far greater and require both an individual and a collective effort to address the issue.

Over-research is particularly prominent in the field of refugee and migration studies, especially after the so-called refugee crisis in Europe in 2015. Despite the fact that research in the field of migration and refugee studies is often undertaken with the best of intentions, researchers do not always consider how the research process affects participants or whether these projects accord with their most pressing needs (Hugman et al. 2011; Jacobsen and Landau 2003). Following the high demand for knowledge on migration and refugees by both media and policymakers, the ‘refugee crisis’ gave birth to a ‘refugee crisis industry’ of which researchers are not only an important part but also are increasingly complicit with (Cabot 2019; Rozakou 2019; Stierl 2020). Being dependent upon humanitarian infrastructure to gain access to the

field, ‘hot spots’ have emerged for studying the plight of refugees, such as refugee camps in Jordan (Pascucci 2017), Lebanon (Sukarieh and Tannock 2012), or the infamous ‘Moria’ camp on Lesbos (Rozakou 2019). According to Cabot (2019), funding structures promote a form of ‘crisis chasing’, which reinforces mechanisms of over-research and conveys researchers a sense of status and authority by having studied a prominent hotspot. Likewise, Sukarieh and Tannock (2019) argue that a ‘refugee research industry’ is benefitting from the institutions and actors it is critiquing through its dependency on state funding and research agendas.

In the field of migration and refugee studies, over-research has several negative consequences for both research participants and the research process. In their study of the Shatila Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, Sukarieh and Tannock (2012) describe how previous research projects and documentary films had turned ‘particularly promising’ individuals into ‘stars’ which had negative long-term consequences for them and the larger community. Over-research in Shatila also led to co-dependencies between NGOs and camp residents, created an overly negative place image, and led to the commodification of research within the refugee camp. Relatedly, Pascucci (2017) found a kind of ‘research savviness’ on the side of participants in over-researched settings, which includes being well-informed about the research process and having higher expectations of research and its outcomes. Over-research also has negative consequences for the outcomes of research, one of which is called the ‘streetlight effect’; a metaphor for how researchers tend to look for answers in places ‘where the looking is good’, rather than where the actual answers may be (Hendrix 2017). Similarly, over-research in the case of the Moria refugee camp contributed to its inaccessibility for researchers and journalists, while the high amount of knowledge produced on the topic mostly only served to reinforce its dystopian image ‘of a place of destitution, abandonment and violence’ (Rozakou 2019, p. 79).

After a short description of the Grandhotel Cosmopolis, the second section discusses the notion of academic tourism and its influence on the accessibility and positionality of the researcher. The third section describes how over-research affected relations of trust between the researcher and research participants in the GHC. Before concluding, the fourth section discusses strategies such as practising engaged reflexivity and knowledge co-production for addressing over-research.

The Grandhotel Cosmopolis

The Grandhotel Cosmopolis is a hotel, asylum seeker centre, café, restaurant, and artist and event space located in the inner city of Augsburg, Germany. From 2011 onwards, the former elderly care home was transformed by artists and activists into a project that calls itself a ‘concrete utopia’ (Grandhotel Cosmopolis 2016). The GHC is an art project inspired by the German artist Joseph Beuys and his concept of a ‘social sculpture’; it is a ‘societal artwork’ in which ‘everyone is welcome to participate’ (Heber et al. 2011; Grandhotel Cosmopolis 2014, 2016). The first group of asylum seekers arrived in July 2013 and in October 2013 the project opened for hotel guests. The building has six floors, with a café/bar and hostel area on the ground floor, space for artists on the ground to third floor, rooms for 60

asylum seekers including shared kitchens and bathrooms on the first to third floor, 12 hotel rooms on the fourth and fifth floor, and a seminar room on the sixth floor. Public events are hosted in the café or in its restaurant located in the basement. The building is owned by the Protestant welfare organisation 'Diakonie', which rents the building to two parties: The non-profit association 'Grandhotel Cosmopolis e.V.' and the local district administration of Bavarian Swabia, who are responsible for housing asylum seekers. As described in an interview with the head of the welfare organisation, the local district administration had already prior to the idea of a 'grandhotel' expressed their interest in renting the building. By agreeing to the concept of an integrated hotel and asylum seeker centre, the number of asylum seekers to be accommodated in the building was reduced, which improved the overall quality of living for asylum seekers as it put less pressure on general facilities.

The project attracted significant local, regional, and national media attention, especially during the time of the so-called 'refugee crisis' in 2015 and won several regional and national prizes, such as the national 'Land of Ideas' competition (Grandhotel Cosmopolis 2016). A search in the news databank LexisNexis brings up over 100 results in German-speaking news media alone. Most major national newspapers, such as the weekly newspaper 'Die Zeit' and German national TV stations have reported on the project (Grandhotel Cosmopolis 2019). Its popularity also attracted a significant number of bachelor, master, and PhD students from all across Germany who wrote their thesis on the project, resulting in several publications (Costa Carneiro 2016; Marschall 2018). In contrast to other alternative accommodation centres such as Plan Einstein in Utrecht (Oliver et al. 2018), the GHC did not have a team of researchers responsible for a coordinated scientific assessment of the project and were relatively unprepared for the amount of media attention they received. The following section reflects on how over-research further complicated the process of gaining access to the GHC and how it challenged pre-conceived ideas on positionality in the field.

Playing the tourist: over-research as a consequence of 'academic tourism'?

The aim of the research project was to study how differences in the spatial, material, and institutional openness of asylum accommodation influenced contact and encounter between asylum seekers and neighbourhood residents (Zill et al. 2019). To this end, I had planned to conduct semi-structured interviews with both neighbourhood residents and asylum seekers living in the GHC, in combination with participatory observation. Having previous research experience in the GHC for my master's thesis, gaining access for me was easier as I benefitted from staying in contact with several members of the GHC. Researchers new to the project had taken a different approach; being denied initial access, one student researcher had booked a hotel room in the GHC and gained access 'as a tourist':

Due to a lack of personal contacts and possible gatekeepers, contact was established via email, to which the response followed that there was not sufficient time to answer the request; in addition, it was stated that a participatory

approach was central to the project. . . . Following the understanding that ‘the ways into the field are as diverse as fieldwork itself’, the researcher booked a room in the hotel and spent a week on site.

(Fischer 2016, p. 53)

To be clear, the intent here is not to point fingers; rather, this excerpt reflects the common viewpoint that there are multiple ways of gaining access all of which have their advantages and disadvantages and are therefore equally valid approaches (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). In other words, the strategies through which researchers obtain access may differ, yet their right to gain access is seldomly questioned in itself; as Bosworth and Kellezi (2016, p. 239) note, ‘if it is discussed at all, is often cast as a one off arrangement, granted or withheld’. Taken individually, gaining access ‘as a tourist’ may not have immediate negative effects on the research setting. However, the collective impact of multiple researchers seeking to obtain permission without the explicit approval of an organisation may work to undermine trust between the researcher and the organisation. In the GHC, previous encounters with student researchers as well as the high number of requests by journalists had led to distrust between its members and researchers and journalists, which contributed to the higher social closedness of the setting. This social closedness, that is, the increasing difficulty of being granted access was supported by the viewpoint that a person is not a product that can be handed over for the purposes of data extraction. As stated repeatedly by several activists, the GHC ‘is not a zoo for viewing refugees’. These statements echo more general critiques on the refugee research industry and the complicity of researchers with the processes and institutions they are critiquing (Cabot 2019; Sukarieh and Tannock 2019).

The extractive tendencies of academic research may be felt more strongly in places of over-research. Despite gaining access by securing the official approval to undertake research in the GHC, I was confronted early on with accusations of representing the ‘university mentality’ and with the implications of not conforming to unwritten codes of conduct. While I had agreed to do voluntary work, such as helping in the bar or hotel, along with providing translations, I was initially perceived as not active enough by one of the founders of the project, who accused me of ‘playing the tourist’:

I started talking to Sarah about what she was doing, she asked what I was doing. We talked a bit about fieldwork and interviewing. Then Christian came and asked what I was doing, he claimed I was ‘playing the tourist’. That I didn’t know what I was doing and that he did not appreciate that. He said he does not like the University mentality, they just want to take things. The people in the Grandhotel were the ones doing something and what good is all that theory. . . . A part of me did feel attacked, and another part learned to not care and just take a note of it as a field observation. But I continued to feel tense, also not welcome and underappreciated to a certain extent.¹

(Fieldnotes, 25.10.2016)

In the GHC, over-research had contributed to an image of academic research as only serving its own interests and eroding societal trust in the university. 'Playing the tourist' is then a reference to a form of temporary and superficial engagement, similar to what Mackenzie et al. (2007) have described as 'fly in, fly out' research. The excerpt is a helpful starting point for reflecting on what it means to '*play the tourist*' in over-researched settings. First, 'playing the tourist' can be interpreted here as a kind of performance, as taking on a certain kind of role or habitus in this particular setting. Yet, this performance is not necessarily a conscious act; rather, the researcher is just as much produced by power relations within a setting. Following Gregson and Rose (2000, p. 441),

performance—what individual subjects do, say, 'act out'—is subsumed within, and must always be connected to, performativity, to the citational practices which reproduce and subvert discourse, and which at the same time enable and discipline subjects and their performances.

Therefore, the first time I undertook research, I followed the GHC's rule to 'be active' and became a volunteer, resisting my researcher role. The second time, I felt pressured by time and project requirements to perform as 'the researcher'. In both cases, I reproduced one of the specific subject positions known to me. In the second case, my positionality akin to that of a tourist, which can be conceived as '*the academic tourist*'.

Academic research is itself a kind of performance, despite the widely held belief within academia that researchers are 'intentional, knowing, anterior subjects; able to interpret and represent a vast range of other social practices for academic audiences to interpret in turn, yet being themselves somehow immune from the same process; in other words, outwith academic power's script' (Gregson and Rose 2000, p. 447). The academic tourist then is a particular way of performing research activity, one that resembles the tourist performance several in the ways. Urry and Larsen (2011) outline several distinct characteristics generally associated with tourism, which can be employed to further define the notion of *academic tourism*. First, academic tourism involves 'movement of people to, and their stay in, various destinations' which are 'outside the normal places of residence and work. Periods of residence elsewhere are of short-term and temporary nature' (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 4). In contrast to tourism, however, academic tourism may also target places that are close to a university or in other ways easily accessible. What still applies, however, is its characteristic to move somewhere and return, to be part of a setting for a short period of time, and constituting a form of *temporary* engagement. As postcolonial and Indigenous scholarship reminds us, going abroad, preferably to countries of the Global South, to undertake fieldwork is and always has been a privilege accorded to universities of the Global North (Bhambra 2013; Smith 2013). These uneven privileges have their history in the formation of disciplines themselves and their involvement in colonialist enterprises; following Tilley (2017, p. 27), 'the systemic extraction of raw commodities from (formerly)

colonised countries finds its analogue in academics' piratic practices of "raw" data extraction for processing into refined intellectual property, to be published at prices which exclude the original contributing "knowers".

Second, academic tourism likewise involves a selection of certain kind of places which are hyped or are associated with certain desires, pleasures, or fantasies and are in some way 'out of the ordinary' (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 4). The images of these places may similarly be projected not only via the media but also through academic publications and policy briefings. Of particular interest to academics studying marginalised communities are thus places with images of danger or precarity, from the classic 'ghetto' to modern day favelas, border zones, and refugee camps (Pascucci 2017; Rozakou 2019). Interestingly, significant overlaps are emerging between academic and conventional forms of tourism through the development of volunteer tourism or war-zone tourism (Mostafanezhad 2013; Mahrouse 2016). Third, the academic tourist gaze is also built upon practices of signification; whereas tourists might look for signs of what they regard as typical local behaviour, the academic tourist is also searching for people, cases, or materials that are informed by a particular idea or theory. Schlosser (2014, p. 203) is critical of an academic gaze informed by empiricist epistemology, which takes for granted a hierarchical relationship between theory, method, and the field. Instead, he argues for a reflexive research practice in which the field informs theory and researchers of what is 'unknown, unknowable, or situationally contingent.' Finally, similar to the effects of mass tourism, academic tourism may contribute to 'new socialised forms of provision . . . to cope with the mass character of the gaze of tourists' (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 4), as has already been shown for refugee camps in Lebanon (Sukarieh and Tannock 2012, 2019). The next section will discuss relations of trust with asylum seekers, along with the possible effects of temporary research engagements.

Trust is like a crocodile: over-research and project-based contact with asylum seekers

Over-research contributed to changes in the norms and rules of conduct in the GHC, such as being critical of the practice of referral of an asylum seeker by a gatekeeper for the purpose of an interview. Therefore, the more 'conventional' approach of using gatekeepers proved nearly impossible. To gain social access, it was necessary to participate and be active within the GHC. Yet, being a young, white, and German woman volunteering in the project made me, for most interviewees, part of the group of 'activists'. As Karim,² an asylum-seeking resident and long-term volunteer in the GHC explained, some resident asylum seekers were afraid that supporting the goals of the activists might have a negative impact on their asylum procedure. Consequently, being perceived as an activist meant that I potentially received a similar level of mistrust as demonstrated by the following excerpt. Karim refuses to act as a gatekeeper for gaining access to other prospective respondents, as trust is not established by momentary smile or friendly facade but has to be established over longer periods of time. Over-research may exacerbate feelings of distrust towards researchers, in particular, with 'hard-to-reach'

groups such as asylum seekers and refugees which have become a 'hot topic' for research and policy interventions (Stierl 2020).

'There is a lack of trust between the refugees and the activists and they need to do things to re-establish their trust. You need to build things together, work together to establish trust, do activities, cook together. But one problem is that the refugees are dependent on the system, as they want to enter normal society and leave the centre. So they distrust the activists, because they are against the system, some of them think that too much involvement with the activists might hurt their future chances. Some of them might even think that they are connected to the police, as they come from places where the system worked like that, so they are distrustful'. . . . Later I asked him if he knew anyone I could talk to. He said, what good would it do for him to introduce me to someone? Trust is like a crocodile—[pulling his face into a broad smile] I need to talk to people to gain their trust.

(Fieldnotes, 26.05.2017)

Not only does over-research increase the levels of distrust by heightening the experiences of lack of impact and temporariness of research but also it may affect what is being said and what is left silent, thus influencing the quality of data gathered. Over-research contributes to already existing difficulties in establishing trust and rapport when studying refugees or irregular migrants (Hynes 2003; Níraghallaigh 2014). As Hynes (2003) highlights, all stages of being a refugee are characterised by mistrust. This high degree of mistrust within different stages of the refugee experience does not automatically mean that research on refugees is impossible; rather, researchers need to be aware of the potential for mistrust. Therefore, 'we need to choose whether we research *for*, *on* or *with* refugees' (Hynes 2003, p. 14). During my interviews with resident asylum seekers, I felt a level of discomfort I could not explain. I confided in Ahmed,² a resident asylum seeker whom I trusted and spent a lot of time with. His reply, presented in the following fieldnote excerpt, indicates that over-research also affects the kind of data researchers gather. Research, in the eyes of participants, becomes less a way of translating experiences than an end in itself within the 'refugee research industry' (Sukarieh and Tannock 2019). As a consequence, researchers' conversations with respondents may 'separate from heart and truth':

I told him about my struggles in talking to people, he said, 'you can talk a lot to people but they will not talk to you with their heart, don't you feel that? They have conversations that are separate from heart and truth'. 'Yes, I do' I said, that is where the discomfort comes from. 'Also they see me as someone from the team'. 'How could they not? We cannot escape our positions'.

(Fieldnotes, 17.05.2017)

Researchers finding themselves in situations of over-research need to take unequal power-relations between themselves and their research participants into account

and how they intentionally or unintentionally exploit these power-relations. In order to ‘collect data’, researchers are trained to develop rapport with research participants, to show empathy when they feel none, or to ‘fake friendship’ with people they would under other circumstances not have considered ‘friends’ (Oakley 1981). Over the course of research, participants may develop expectations of friendship, especially those that do not have a large social support system. Despite the fact that formal consent is obtained, in practice, participants’ contextual realities may limit them in their capacity to provide consent (Thompson 2002). This is already problematic under ‘normal’ circumstances and yet becomes a profound ethical dilemma in situations of over-research, especially in situations where vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers and refugees are involved (Mackenzie et al. 2007). Amooz, a young, male asylum seeker from Afghanistan and volunteer in the GHC explained that he disliked the pretence involved when refugees are approached on the basis of a project. He argued that while he appreciated help, it should be based in real interest in friendship and an understanding of mutuality. This is captured in his wish to be invited into someone’s home to establish ‘real’ relationships:

For example, when somebody wants to help refugees voluntarily, that’s okay. Helping, accompanying, but not because of a shitty project, because they want to finish a project. And then they say, bye. They don’t want to know you. . . . Project is finished, they leave. . . . It’s also okay if they do a project. But not come to you because of the project, to say hello. It would be cool if also when there is no project, that he says hello. For example, taking me to his home and live together without a project, hey, how are you.³

(Interview with Amooz)

In summary, over-research of vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers may lead to considerable ethical difficulties regarding the establishment of trust and rapport. It is crucial not to frame research participants as victims of researchers, as they choose to participate due to certain expectations emerging from this encounter, such as help with translations and emotional or other kinds of support (Mackenzie et al. 2007). More importantly, however, over-research in the form of high numbers of researchers with a temporary stay may worsen feelings of loss and cause considerable emotional harm to individuals with limited or fragile social networks. The next section will return to the notion of academic tourism and reflect on different strategies to process and approach over-research.

From academic tourist to academic-in-residence: strategies to address the consequences of over-research

Over-research is first and foremost a question of research integrity, yet one that still has to be recognised as such. According to Kaiser (2014, p. 341), research integrity is defined as a situation in which ‘its practitioners behave in accordance with the accepted rules of good conduct within that system’. The problem regarding over-research is that as of now there are no ethical and methodological

standards in place for defining 'good conduct' in situations of over-research. We need to differentiate here between our individual and our collective responsibilities towards research integrity. This section addresses the question of individual responsibility based on insights gained from a post-fieldwork engagement as an 'academic-in-residence' in the GHC.

Adopting a practice of engaged reflexivity: acknowledging the academic tourist in me

To gain an understanding of the dynamics and implications of over-researched situations, what we as individual researchers should reflect upon is our relations with others, as our subject positions are constituted by these everyday interactions. Research, in this understanding, is 'a process of constitutive negotiation' (Rose 1997, p. 316). In my struggle to uphold my performance as 'the researcher', I felt a sense of discomfort I could not explain. It is the awareness of and will to engage with this discomfort which prompted me to recognise the specific inter-personal dynamics characteristic to over-researched places. A first step in addressing our individual responsibilities towards over-research is then to practise reflexivity and 'engaged self-critique' (Cabot 2019). As feminist geographers have argued, reflexivity has its challenges and limitations. Particularly problematic is the notion of 'transparent reflexivity', which assumes that as researchers we are capable of fully grasping the landscapes of power in which we are operating and our positionality within them (Rose 1997). Despite these challenges, however, there are different kinds of reflexive practices which nevertheless constitute helpful tools for detecting and understanding situations of over-research.

Researchers in over-researched settings are often faced with research fatigue, which is expressed as apathy or indifference towards engagement in research projects (Clark 2008). Researchers' ability to determine when a situation is 'over'-researched therefore necessitates that individual researchers actively engage with the emotional landscapes of the places and cases they are studying. Being reflexive of our own emotions thus constitutes one of the tools to detect and understand the inter-personal dynamics of over-research (Davidson et al. 2007). Frequently, emotions are associated with a failure in 'neutrality' and 'objectivity', with possible consequences for one's future career (Widdowfield 2000). However, researchers not engaging with emotional experiences during fieldwork in the worst case run the risk of doing emotional harm to both themselves and their research participants and at best are neglecting a potentially enlightening field of knowledge. This is built on the understanding that emotions are relational; as Widdowfield (2000, p. 200) states, 'not only does the researcher affect the research process but they are themselves affected by this process'. Emotional reflexivity is therefore key to detecting and understanding over-researched settings, as research fatigue and distrust are not always openly voiced but may surface in the behaviour of those we engage with during the research process. In the words of respondent Ahmed, research is often undertaken 'separate from heart and truth'. Practising emotional reflexivity and understanding how our own emotions are tied up with those of

others may thus help to detect and understand the emotional landscapes of over-researched settings and how these may influence the data collected.

Practically speaking, writing down and reflecting upon the feelings which we think we should not feel and certainly do not publicly want to acknowledge is a first step towards detecting and understanding the situations of over-research. The aforementioned fieldnote excerpts and interview quotes exhibit the relational nature of feelings trespassing between the activists, asylum seekers and myself, such as feeling underappreciated and unwelcome when confronted with the accusation of ‘playing the tourist’. One way of learning from the emotional landscapes of over-researched settings is then to not only pay attention to how one feels but also to our own moral judgements about those feelings. Emotions tend to be noticed when they run up against so-called ‘feeling rules’ (Young and Lee 1996) of how and what one ‘ought’ to feel during fieldwork. As Bondi (2007, p. 236) notes, ‘the co-construction of data in interpersonal relationships requires both researchers and those with whom they interact to deploy a wide range of skills to which emotional life is integral’. Consequently, Bondi (2007) argues that researchers should have support structures to analyse feelings within their research community, as feelings can be easily misinterpreted (Bondi 2007). Moreover, given the relational nature of emotions, neglecting our emotional life may affect our ability to do research, as well as influence the way we relate to research participants. The following section discusses the possibilities and limits of ‘relating differently’ with over-researched settings.

Relating differently: from collecting data to collective data?

In the following, two other accusations regarding ‘academic tourism’ are addressed: First, the extractive manner of research ‘taking things’ and second, the usefulness of theoretical abstraction or ‘what good is all that theory’. Along with discomfort, I felt a sense of failure that arose out of the conviction that a different way of relating with the field was necessary to uphold research integrity. As described in section three, as an academic tourist I was seen to embody a ‘university mentality’ of ‘just taking things’. This is a critique of the extractive character of research, which is often felt more strongly in situations of over-research and echoes criticism levied against mass or ‘over-tourism’ (Seraphin et al. 2018). Feminist and postcolonial scholars in particular have criticised the extractive nature of research, especially when knowledge is expropriated from the Global South and fed into the knowledge circuits of the global north (Jazeel and McFarlane 2010; Halvorsen 2018). In the case of ‘over-tourism’, general recommendations are to find a form of management that either restricts or bans tourism altogether or to develop a form of sustainable tourism for each particular location (Borg et al. 1996; Russo 2002). To address the extractive nature of research and develop more sustainable research practices, it is necessary to not only *think about* but also *practice* a form of research that takes its *collective* impact into account.

Honestly addressing over-research and academic tourism requires not only different methodologies but also a critical interrogation of our research ethics. We

should be highly critical of 'easy fixes' to over-research that address methodology alone, such as calls for more participatory approaches. As Pain and Francis (2003, p. 53) remind us, 'the term "participatory" should be avoided when the primary intention is traditional "extractive" research for the purposes of gathering information'. A change of methods is therefore not sufficient to address over-research as this problem concerns not only the way we select research topics and field sites but also which kinds of relations we want to engage in and sustain with the people and communities we study. Responsible academic research for over-researched places then requires honesty about our own intentions of doing research towards both ourselves, our research participants, and the academic community. To not *only to take* but also *to give* we need to engage with the possibilities and limitations of reciprocity. It means not to shy away from asking why and for whom we are doing this research and who will *truly* benefit from it. As outlined earlier, a relational form of reflexivity is a part of this, along with a serious engagement with the politics of knowledge production (Jazeel and McFarlane 2010; Routledge and Derickson 2015). Wherever possible, this means resisting institutional pressures towards academic tourism, characterised by short-term forms of research engagements and the temptations of hot topics, as these may result in over-research, as exemplified by research on refugee camps (Sukarieh and Tannock 2012, 2019).

Giving back, that is, engaging in reciprocal relations is influenced by our ontological and epistemological assumptions towards our research subjects. Ontologically, this means to question who we see as producers of knowledge and whether knowledge is created *on* or *with* our research subjects. Scholar-activists have claimed that social movements are often the basis for theoretical innovations and shape academic knowledge production in profound ways. Social movements should therefore be seen as 'knowledge producers in their own right', rather than mere 'objects of knowledge' (Chesters 2012, p. 153). Any efforts of researchers to position themselves at a distance or as 'an observer' may have a negative impact not only on relations of trust, as outlined earlier, but also on reciprocity. The GHC produces practical, inter-subjective knowledge by establishing an alternative form of asylum accommodation. Its members have been invited to speak in forums and conferences all across Germany on this topic, while the academic debate on alternative forms of accommodation has followed much later. Creating knowledge together *with* projects such as the GHC requires an awareness of the specific questions of and a close connection with the local level. While this might not always be possible, joint knowledge production together with the subjects of our research might lead our research to be more current—not being attracted to a topic when it is already 'hot' and to be there before it becomes 'hot'. Engaging in joint knowledge production could also help avoid research fatigue, even in places which receive a lot of research attention, as research fatigue is caused by not being in tune with the questions and issues 'on the ground' and by insufficiently striving towards reciprocal relationships with the subjects of our research.

Addressing over-research requires moving from 'collecting data to collective data', meaning a more responsible form of knowledge production which includes accountability towards the local context in which our research is situated. To learn

how to ‘relate differently’ and to ‘give back’, I returned to the GHC towards the end of my research project to become an ‘academic-in-residence’. Between the months October 2019 and January 2020, I rented a desk in the GHC with some leftover research funding, dividing my time between finishing up my academic writing and helping out with whatever was needed in the everyday running of the project. In November 2019, I organised a public event in which I and two other speakers presented our academic findings related to innovative forms of asylum accommodation. These four months gave me a glimpse of what it means to ‘relate differently’ and how academic knowledge can be made useful in an activist context. Knowledge co-production is not necessarily about a particular method, but about making knowledge production more transparent, accessible and open to forms of responsible learning (Jazeel and McFarlane 2007). As an ‘academic-in-residence’, I found myself inserting theoretical insights, concepts and findings of my own work into everyday conversations. Not in the form of a lecture, but in dialogue as a way to give a name to on-going structures and processes. Some of these ‘theory snippets’ echoed back when they proved useful for clarifying problems at hand, teaching me which theoretical lenses might constitute tools for social change. More than any particular method, it was my daily presence and my long-term engagement with the GHC that created the conditions and relationships for dialogue. Moving towards joint forms of knowledge production does not mean to do away with abstraction; instead, we need to inquire ‘how knowledge produced through research might be of use to multiple others without re-inscribing the interests of the privileged; and how such knowledge might be actively tied to a material politics of social change’ (Routledge and Derickson 2015, p. 393). While there are different strategies for how this can be achieved, theory and knowledge production can be made useful when it is accountable to its context and produced in dialogue. In an increasingly complex world, it is not only our privilege but our task to make the process and products of abstraction publicly available.

Addressing academic tourism: a question of research ethics in over-researched places

This chapter discussed the challenges of over-research in the context of migration and refugee research by examining fieldwork undertaken in an innovative form of asylum seeker accommodation, the Grandhotel Cosmopolis in Augsburg, Germany. During the ‘refugee crisis’, this project attracted scores of journalists, students, and researchers, which led to over-research and research fatigue among its inhabitants and members of staff. Over-research also led to challenging interpersonal dynamics, such as difficulties in gaining access to research participants due to the lack of trust and the increased social closedness of the setting. Social closedness resulted from the contention that ‘refugees are not a product’ for research, thus, closedness emerged to prevent the commodification of research and refugees. In addition, commodified social relations in the form of ‘project-based’ contact may take advantage of individuals in marginalised positions with limited social support systems and lead to feelings of loss. The case is illustrative of larger dynamics within

academic knowledge production, such as 'crisis chasing', motivated by funding structures and public pressures to research 'hot topics' (Cabot 2019).

Over-researched places should not be seen as exceptions to the norm but rather as a magnifying glass for the norm. As researchers, we bear responsibility not only for our individual, but also for our collective performances and their consequences. Over-research and research fatigue are not marginal phenomena but may constitute one of the greatest challenges social science scholars have to face in the upcoming decade. Given the growth in student numbers in higher education and in research projects across the globe, an intensification of over-research is to be expected. It is crucial then that we do not shy away from interrogating uncomfortable or disorienting moments, such as being accused of 'academic tourism'. Reflecting, rather than shying away from our own emotions, may constitute a first step in acknowledging that 'something is not quite as it should be'. Beyond the individual research encounter, over-research may influence the relationship between university and society; changes in this relationship are already mirrored in increasing pressures of societal impact assessments (Pain et al. 2011). Similarly, under-research may also be undesirable as the places, cases, or communities are neither represented within our findings nor can they be considered in policymaking (Omata 2019).

What can researchers do to address over-research? In short, the credo is 'beware and be aware'; beware of 'hot topic' research, famous or hyped places, cases or communities, of your own 'good intentions', and your desire to set yourself apart. Beware also of 'easy fixes' to over-research, such as calls for more participatory methods, as these do not necessarily change the extractive character of research itself. Over-research is first and foremost not a question of methodology but of research ethics. At its core lies the question of how we choose to relate towards our research subjects and objects. Over-research therefore demands both an individual and a collective response; it requires individual awareness and a collective effort to engage with and address inequalities in the current system of academic knowledge production. Still, every collective shift starts with individual awareness: Be aware that researchers have come before you and will come after you. Be aware of the places, cases, or communities that are flying under the radar for they also have stories to tell. Be aware that social movements, collectives, and communities are also producers of knowledge and that they too are 'experts'. Be aware that while the products of academic knowledge may not be of interest to all, this does not mean that the process of abstraction and search for explanations of complex realities may still interest 'non-academics'. Be aware that your status as an academic comes with both privileges and duties; especially academics of the Global North are afforded privileged access to resources and education. It is our duty to reflect on this privilege and use it not only towards contributions to theory and knowledge but also to engage in the co-production of knowledge whenever and wherever feasible. Finally, be aware of your own emotions and use them to critically interrogate the individual and collective dynamics of knowledge production. Being honest with ourselves and our research participants about the limitations of our research might seem daunting but just as well might establish a solid foundation for re-energizing the relationship between academia and society.

Notes

- 1 All fieldnotes were originally written in English.
- 2 Pseudonym. All respondents were anonymised for the purpose of research.
- 3 Translated from German.

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