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'We see you' – *Sawubona*, safe spaces and being human together in South Africa: An ethnographic probe into a fresh expression of church

Authors:
Ian A. Nell[1]
Ben Aldous[1]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Practical Theology and Missiology, University of Stellenbosch, Cape Town, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Ian Nell,
ianell@sun.ac.za

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Since the end of apartheid and the advent of democratic elections, South Africa has made great strides, but we still continue, at times, to be unable to practise *sawubona*. On one level, this is not surprising given our history of separateness. The article asks whether fresh expressions of church, such as the community supper at St Peters in Mowbray, Cape Town, indeed create a space for genuinely 'seeing' each other and practicing being human together. The article also explores some of the problems inherent in ethnographic work amongst the poor and the vulnerable by asking whether some types of ethnographic work actually practice a form of epistemic violence and muses upon the idea of the postcolonial gaze and 'othering' in ethnography in contexts of poverty in the global South. Can ethnography, in some cases, be a form of academic pornography?

Keywords: Fresh expressions of church; Safe spaces; Ethnography; Epistemic violence; *Sawubona*.

Introduction

Fresh expressions of church (FXoC) have been growing significantly in the United Kingdom, Western Europe and North America over the past 10–15 years, but examples from the global south have by and large been absent. This article explores how members of the community supper at St Peter's in Mowbray, Cape Town, have journeyed towards being an authentic ecclesial community that is practicing *sawubona* and being human together. However, a word of caution in this must be noted. At the most recent Ecclesiology and Ethnography Conference at St John's at Durham in September 2018, a number of those engaging in doctoral work gave presentations. One of the authors of this article was struck by the use of the word 'gaze' on a number of occasions used to describe the participant's observation being undertaken. Perhaps, it is because the ethnographic work has taken place in a post-colonial setting, where issues of power and mission as colonialism and whiteness continue to be deeply unsettling in our context, that the authors were perturbed by the use of language of this type. In general, little attention has been given to the issue of power and post-colonialism in the FXoC movement. This is, in part, because much of the development of the movement is taking place in Western Europe, North America and Australasia. In non-Western and post-colonial contexts, like much of Africa and Asia, the issue of power comes to the fore more often in ecclesial contexts.

In this article, we explore the work of the community supper based at St Peter's as a fresh expression of church now in its eighth year of existence. The supper was begun on 23 February 2011 by a group of 15 people from the church and the local community who simply wanted to eat a meal together. Today, roughly 150 people eat a meal each week. The majority of those who gather were described by one interviewee as:

> [*D*]isadvantaged people from the system of apartheid. So, they are descendants of parents that suffered in the middle of the system, and the result that they're on the streets and in the gutter and in that condition is by no means purely their fault. It's a result of the system that brought them to that point. (Participant 11, undisclosed gender, date unknown)

Our research aim is to find out whether FXoCs in South Africa like the community supper are places that practise *sawubona*. Our secondary aim is to explore some of the complex issues around ethnographic work amongst those who have been previously excluded and disadvantaged and the ethical dilemmas of voicing and giving space to those who have been subjugated and battered, by apartheid.

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Initially, we explore something of the supper and who makes up the complex mix of guests, volunteers and leaders. Secondly, we share the research methodology used in this project. Thirdly, we interrogate the supper in terms of the *sawubona* and being human together. Fourthly, we explore the dangers inherent to doing ethnographic work amongst those who are vulnerable. Finally, we draw some brief conclusions.

Fresh expressions of church is a movement that has grown over the last 15 years with the initial publication of a 2004 church house report that subsequently became a bestseller (Moynagh 2012:52). Fresh Expressions South Africa has adapted and contextualised the Mission-shaped Intro (MSI) course and is seeking to journey with denominations and local church leaders to plant new contextual churches. Croft (2008) describes an FXoC as:

> [*A*] form of church for *our* changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples; It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context. (p. 9)

The community supper

The community supper at St Peter's is in a stage of ecclesial liminality. By that we mean that the supper fulfils the 9 or 10 criteria set down by the Church Army research wing in Sheffield, UK,[1] for defining legitimately the Anglican FXoC. The supper struggled in point 6 because concerning its relationship with the suffragan bishop of the diocese and therefore was not seen as a legitimate part of the diocese. However, it had followed the process of listening, serving, making disciples and gathering for worship, as shown in Figure 1.

Methodology

As mentioned in the introduction, the supper is made up, in the majority, of those sleeping rough and a significant group of African nationals who have often travelled overland through the continent to make Cape Town their home. For the purposes of the research, and in delineating the interviews, we spoke to people who were categorised as guests (who came only to eat and occasionally take part in a bi-weekly Eucharist). Secondly, volunteers who came to serve in a whole host of ways from making tea, to washing up, to managing the logistics of serving 150 people meals at the tables. Finally, leaders who had originally pioneered the supper and were responsible for the overall vision and functioning as sense makers for the community. Whilst these were separate ways of identifying who was who, there was a degree of porosity regarding who fell into which category. Generally, there was a sense that all were to be called guests. One of the authors of this article noticed how, during the weekly pre-prayer time for the supper, the phrase 'help us all be guests' was used regularly by long-term volunteers.

During the research, over a period of 5 months, data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews with 15 members of the community and documents that were mostly made up of grey literature (e.g. YouTube clips, websites and minutes kept by the church council). As Cameron and Duce (2013:142–143) note, 'faith communities and church based organisations produce huge quantities of grey literature'. Atlas.ti was used to organise the transcribed interviews, field notes and documents. Atlas.ti is a qualitative data analysis tool whose 'software frees you from all those tasks that a machine can do much more effectively … like searching for key words, integrating material into one place, etc.' (Friese 2014:2)

Following the work of LeCompte and Schensul (2013:93), a four-step process was used, which they described as 'recursive'. This recursive process is both inductive and deductive. LeCompte and Schensul (2013:90) outline how results emerge from data. This is a complex and tricky pursuit. Because qualitative research involves words, 'words are fatter than numbers; they have multiple and sometimes ambiguous meanings' (LeCompte & Schensul 2013:90). The problem faced by ethnographers is that they must somehow organise and classify segments of text. Ethnographers are sensitised to *noticing* specific ideas (LeCompte & Schensul 2013:91) because of the conceptual or theoretical frameworks with which they work. Data analysis then, in another way, is the moving back and forth between concrete pieces of text to greater levels of abstraction and back again.

Those 'pieces' start at the most concrete phase.

- These are called *items* or *facts*. They consist of discrete and concrete activities, objects, persons or other low-level classifications that fit together under a single definition. That is, items and units are alike on the basis of some criteria that cause them to be clustered or classified into a single category.
- The second phase of the process speaks about *units* or *variables* consisting of clusters of items. The multiple ways in which these items differ, despite sharing common criteria within a cluster, constitute a variation in the variable.

1.(1) Was something Christian and communal brought to 'birth' that was new and further, rather than an existing group modified? (2) Has the starting group tried to engage with non-churchgoers? There was the intention to create a fresh expression of Church, not to begin an outreach project from an existing church. The aim was for the Christians to change, to fit into a culture and context, and not make the local or indigenous people change, to fit into an existing church context. (3) Does the resultant community meet at least once a month? In cases of monthly meetings, further questions about how to deepen community, build commitment and increase discipleship follow. (4) Does it have a name that helps to give it an identity? An active search, not yet yielding a name, is allowed. (5) Is there intention to be church? This could be from the start, or by discovery on the way. This admits the embryonic fxD (fx of developing community) and cases of fxE (fx of evangelism) and even some fxW (fx of worship). The key is that they are not seen as a bridge back to 'real church'. (6) Is it Anglican, or an Anglican partner in an Ecumenical project? 'Anglican' here means the bishop welcomes it as part of the diocesan family, not whether it only uses centrally authorised worship texts, or has a legal territory such as a parish. (7) There is some form of leadership recognised within, and also without. (8) At least the majority of members (who are part of the public gathering) see it as their major expression of being church. (9) There is aspiration for the four creedal 'marks' of church, or ecclesial relationships: 'up/holy, in/one, out/apostolic, of/catholic'. We question validity in an absence of 'mission/out'. (Our Church Army team see the two dominical sacraments as a given consequence of the life of a missional community which follows Jesus, but not the sole or even the best measure of being church.) (10) There is intent to become 'three self' (self-financing, self-governing and self-reproducing). These factors need contextualisation, but are some marks of advancing maturity. They are not to be interpreted as indicators of congregationalist independency, or breakaway tendencies.

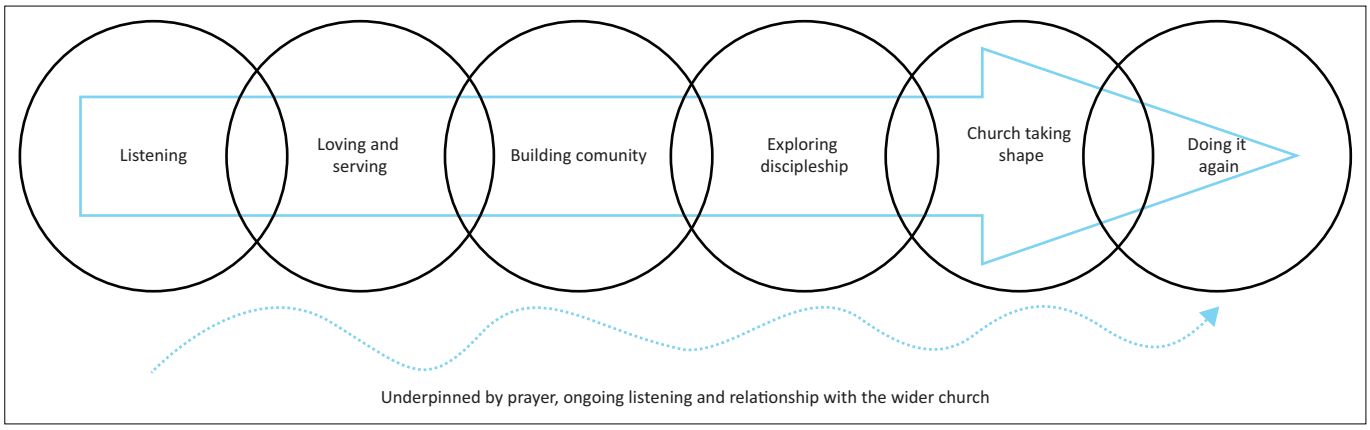

FIGURE 1: A fresh expressions journey.

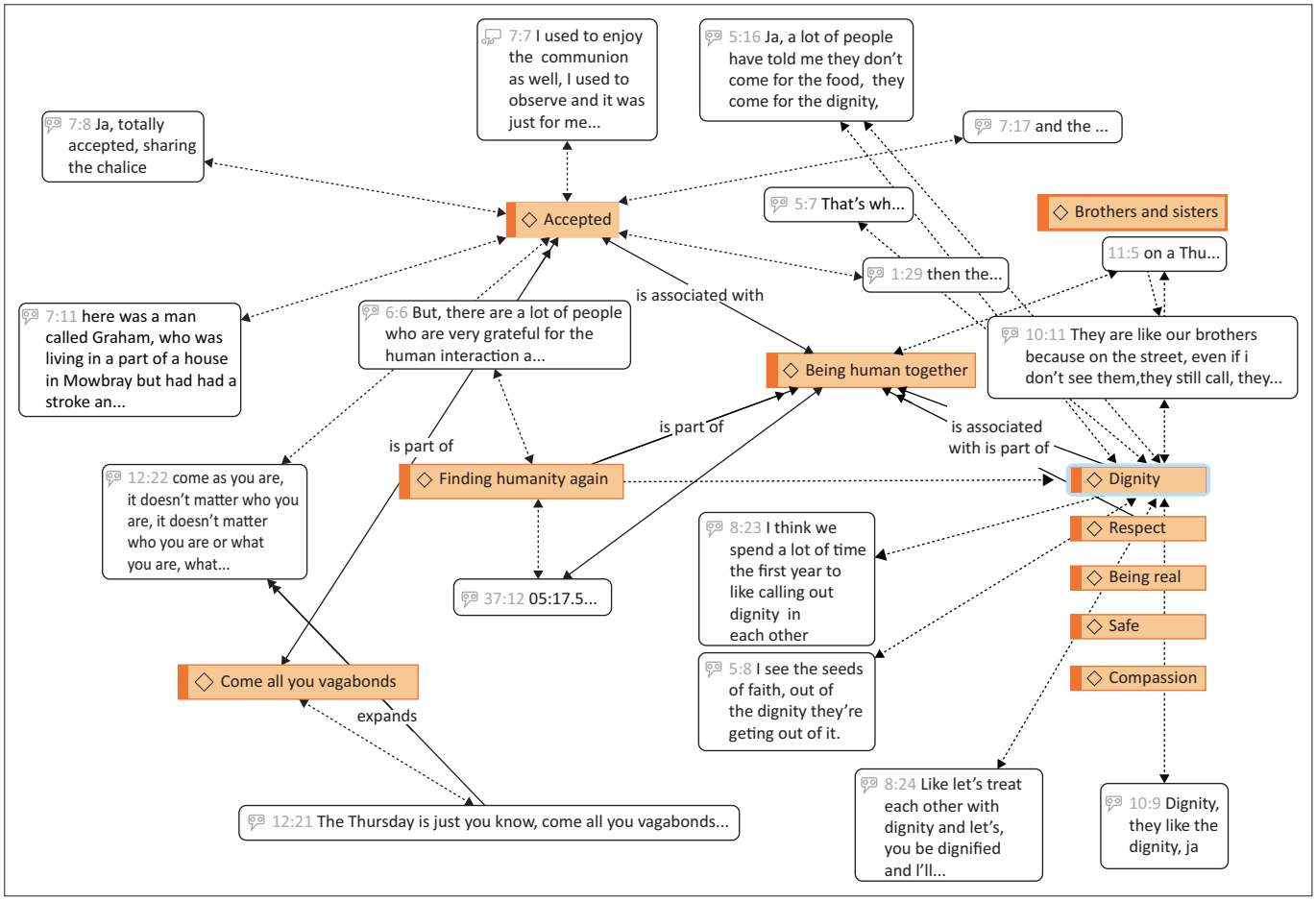

FIGURE 2: A pattern of codes categorised under 'being human'.

- Thirdly, *patterns* or *factors* consist of groupings or collections of these categories.
- Finally, *domains* consist of larger groups of patterns that are linked together in ways that form the foundation for an overall cultural portrayal or theory that explains a cultural phenomenon.

Out of this process, we identified a set of codes. The codes, Accepted, Being human together, Being real, Brothers and sisters, Come all you vagabonds, Compassion, Dignity, Finding humanity again, Respect and Safe, were grouped together around a *pattern* of 'being human'. A visual of the codes and some of their interrelationship is depicted in Figure 2.

As researchers, we were very much aware that leading, and participating in, an FXoC in South Africa in the 21st century was a complex pursuit. There is a need to be cognisant of the ways in which the church has on occasions been complicit with the power structures that keep people apart from one another. In the current climate of #rhodesmustfall and questions regarding decolonisation in both the church and

society, questions need to be asked about whether the FXoC movement is a neo-colonial force or whether it is decolonising the church as part of its remit.

Over the past 25 years, since the first democratic elections, South Africa has made great strides, but we still continue, at times, to be unable to practise *sawubona*. The notion of *sawubona* is more than simply the literal translation of 'we see you', which is usually rendered as the greeting 'hello' from isiZulu. One of the authors recalls the way in which Archbishop Thabo Makgoba would gather clergy from the diocese of Cape Town and greet them with *sawubona*. His use of the greeting was a deep reminder that we were not only seen but also recognised and accepted and valued, even in the lonely and sometimes unglamorous parish ministry. In this article, we use the notion of *sawubona* as articulated by Archbishop Thabo.

Our inability to practice *sawubona* interracially is on one level not surprising, given our history of separateness. The separateness of South African society existed long before the 1948 National Party government began implementing a wide range of laws, from the *Population Registration and Group Areas Acts* to the *Bantu Education Act*. All sought to institutionalise racial discrimination.

Consequently, political geographer Gillian Hart (2013) says:

> At the moment when former president F.W. de Klerk unbanned the ANC and other liberation movements, in 1990, the South African nation was deeply in question. Quite literally it had to be conjured into existence out of the rubble of a deeply divided nation. (p. 5)

We might ask the question: How are we getting on with the conjuring process? Ivor Chipkin (2007:189) notes that 'in the absence of any traditional unifying principles (of language, culture, religion, race and so on), the identity of South Africans is elusive'. Part of this elusiveness is born out of a divided history. One group's liberator was another group's terrorist and with no agreed shared history or way of narrating the past and the tendency of one politically dominant group claiming exclusive control over the shaping of the narrative, a manipulated memory comes to the fore. In a world increasingly shaped by ontological anxiety and where liberal democracy is struggling, how do we as people overcome our national woundedness and trauma in order to see one another?

Practicing *sawubona* and being human together

The community supper is situated in Cape Town, which 'is a post-apartheid city that continues to be a place where residents on the margins must fight for their *right to the city*' (Headley 2018:3). A majority of the guests and volunteers who make up the supper fall into the category of the marginalised. Many are long-term homeless people and experience the dehumanising effects of rough sleeping. One man in an interview spoke about the dehumanising experience of sleeping rough.

> **Interviewer:** Are there other places where you feel you are not human?
>
> **Interviewee:** Yes, that happens most of the time during the day, during the week wherever you walk where you can see just by the looks that you get on the street from people, is more like an outcast, more like you are the dregs of society and things like that, so nobody has got time to find out where do you come from, what happened to you, why are you and things like that, to them it's just like you want to be like that and nobody knows how I came that I ended up in that situation. (Participant 11, undisclosed gender, date unknown)

The community that gathers on a Thursday night has a set of values that is often circulated on an A6 piece of paper to newcomers who wish to volunteer. The meal is committed to enacting seven values:

- Everyone is welcome.
- We eat a meal together.
- We pursue mutual transformation.
- We become neighbours and friends by hearing one another's stories.
- We are a safe space.
- We encourage one another in following Jesus.
- We work at equalising power.

One guest who was interviewed, anonymised as P11, said: 'What I appreciate most of the community dinners is that for the hour that I am here … I am human … there are people who are interested in me'. Being able to express the idea that others might be interested in him even though he slept on the street, had a serious criminal record and was sometimes intoxicated at the meal should not be overlooked. Being 'seen' and 'accepted' as you are was almost exclusively not the norm in other soup kitchens or religious establishments. In fact, one could argue that the supper became, over time, a place where rough sleepers could, in fact, detox from the kind of religious obsequiousness that was sometimes required to secure a meal in other church-run food provision settings. 'Seeing' each other was more than simply acknowledging the other's presence but was the start of inviting one another into deep fellowship or *koinonia.* Nor was it simply middle-class white members of the supper being able to 'see' those from the leftovers of apartheid as human beings. The reverse was also happening. Those dehumanised and brutalised by apartheid structures also participated in a new way of 'seeing' those once only considered superior. In this way, there was a reciprocity in relationships and a re-humanising on both fronts.

The supper was not intentionally created to service the needs of the community of rough sleepers from the southern suburbs, but over the past 7 years, it has developed into a space where people can genuinely meet one another, enjoy a meal and see one another in new ways. For many, sleeping rough means there is an absence of safety in their lives. 'It was street ministry but within the confines of a safe space, which was something I had never really seen before' (P29); 'I have people say stuff to me about it or talk about enjoying the peace of this space' (P8).

Creating safe spaces that equalise power and truly allow people to be human is vital if we are going to undo the dehumanising effects apartheid continues to have. Cilliers suggests (2007), following the work of The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, that:

> [*T*]hese spaces originate in relationships where honesty is a *sine qua non*, but held in tension with respect. In other words: differences are put on the table and not hidden or masked, but these differences may never lead to disrespect of the other. On the other hand, acknowledgment of past and present transgressions is held in tension with responsibility – a deep confession coupled with the sincere desire to act and to transform that which was and still is wrong in our society. In this way, through mutual adherence to these four basic values, a framework for dialogue in a 'safe space' can be created: honesty, but with respect; acknowledgment, but with responsibility. (p. 19)

Whilst Cilliers (2007) uses the idea put on the table as a metaphor, we wondered if the actual idea of eating together, being served a meal together, actually helps to create a deeper level of that safe space. Missiologist William Saayman (2010:1) suggests that because of 'the various embodiments of social alienation an important causative factor in the alienation is the lack of common human South African identity'. We have already noted above from Hart (2013) and Chipkin (2007) the elusive nature of South African identity, but follow Saayman's (2010) and De Gruchy's (2006) suggestions that perhaps the lack of social cohesion and identity is linked to the question asked by Saayman (2010): 'Is it perhaps the case that we are not at all at ease with everything that belongs to the human condition in South Africa?' (p. 1). The dehumanising effects of apartheid still linger. Again, as Saayman (2010:1) reminds us, at the height of the state of emergency, an illegitimate regime tried to maintain its power; 'these were years when images of inhuman deeds committed by human beings against other human beings were seared on to our consciences'.

In approaching the supper, we were seeking to draw out the quality of relationships that existed between people who gathered to eat a meal on a Thursday night. One question asked was to describe some of the relationships that they have with people there. P4, a homeless young woman, responded: 'How can I say now … it is something like we are all human and we [are] all people, it doesn't matter what situation you are [in]'. P11, an older man who had been sent to prison for life, but found himself up for parole in an unexpected turn of events, said: 'Then come on a Thursday and then you find yourself for one hour I can be human … for one hour I have dignity'. P37, who grew up on the streets but found an opportunity to escape after the death of his mother, saw the gathering on Thursdays as a space for the recovering of humanity that is potentially lost by the dehumanising effects of living as a rough sleeper: 'All you look at and all you see is human beings coming together. But this allows you to find humanity again'. Finally, P5, a long-term member of the St Peter's Church community who had helped host a table for a number of years, said, 'Ja, a lot of people have told me they don't come for the food, they come for the dignity, and I know it's for the hunger for God'.

An extract from our field notes dated 07 December 2017 states:

> If being human together is a central theme it seems theological persuasions are very much secondary. Having said that there is a very real spirituality being grown at tables. Tonight I see two people being prayed for having shared something of their week or their story. (Field research notes, 07 December 2017)

Those interviewed, not only guests but also pioneer leaders (P1, P2, P3 and P8), all spoke of the idea of being human and calling out dignity in one another as the core value of the supper. Again, from our field notes, P2 often used the phrase, 'this is a place where we practice being human together several times in the evening'. It could be that these words had subconsciously infiltrated the minds of the guests and volunteers.

Saayman (2010:7) believes that the need for a new human identity is paramount and that it starts with the notion of being *homo sapiens* before being rich or poor, black or white. According to Saayman (2010):

> [*I*]t is an open secret that we had no shared rights and no shared human identity in colonial times and under *Apartheid*: ethnocentrism, or our status as oppressor or oppressed precluded a shared human identity. (p. 3)

We argue that those former categories are being erased, or certainly become blurred at the supper, as people sit and share a meal. This is not instantaneous. One of the values of the meal states 'We *work* at equalising power'. This seems to suggest an ongoing, incomplete and humble posture regarding genuinely being human together. Those interviewed who would fall into the category of leftovers of our history of racist–capitalist injustice appeared to experience the supper as a place of genuine acceptance. Interestingly, P7, a white middle-class woman, revealed that she felt totally accepted:

> **P7**: … they've been incredibly welcoming … nobody is trying to get me to join the church or …
>
> **Interviewer**: convert or do something?
>
> **P7**: No pressure or, you know I'm upfront and … this is who I am, I don't go to church, I … don't want to join a church, I don't want to be tied down to anything.
>
> **Interviewer**: But you're respected for being you.
>
> **P7**: Ja. And they've been incredibly accepting.

This kind of acceptance is noted in Nell and Grobler's (2014) work on FXoC in the United Kingdom. They note that in many instances, it was an accepting movement: 'There are no hidden agendas and no efforts to make someone a part of "your congregation", but rather an acceptance and attitude of love towards who enters their community' (Nell & Grobler 2014:755). Part of this acceptance was being able to be real with one another and not wearing some kind of mask, as P11 said:

> In other places like outside you know that you've got to hold back because you can see this person is not being sincere with you so why must I be sincere with you … so instead of going that path

> I rather just clamp down and I walk away. I'm not going to sit and still entertain anything here with this person because I can see he is not being truthful. It's all about wearing a mask, whereas here at the community there is no mask, everybody is being you, so I don't need to have a mask. (Participant 11, undisclosed gender, date unknown)

Ethnographic work amongst vulnerable people

However, whilst encouraging new interpersonal relationships being developed, we also contend that the very act of researching a community of people largely made up of the vulnerable and broken can, in itself, be a sort of epistemic violence. Whilst one author sought to be sensitive during the 5-month research process, he was very aware of the power dynamics in being a white educated middle-class foreign man. Hankela (2015:202) points out that 'research relationships are embedded in a world of conflicts marked by system-backed privilege and system-created domination'. The attempt was made to consciously note that 'investigating the limits to hearing should be an imperative part of the research practice of middle-class scholars, and much more so white and/or male middle-class scholars' (Hankela 2015:204). Kritzinger (2012:235) also notes the issue of voicelessness amongst those who feel inferior. It is not so much about giving a voice to those interviewed who fell in a previously disadvantaged category, but 'rather [to] speak of inviting someone's voice to be part of the academic conversation' (Hankela 2015:204). Although Hankela's notion of invitation is valuable in reality unless the research is genuinely emancipatory and mutual, this tends not to happen. The problem is that researchers often have almost complete control over the voices of those on the margins. One of the authors could edit, code, dissect and appropriate those voices. Whilst we were genuinely trying to allow those previously subjugated, unheard and restrained in the past to sing out, it was always channelled and held by us. In retrospect, a more reciprocal and genuinely shared research methodology would perhaps have been a better approach in such a setting. The very act of publishing this article calls into question how much academic work is essentially about benefiting ourselves and our academic careers, whatever stage they are in, over and against real transformative work in broken communities. Whilst they are not mutually exclusive, we do wonder how easy it is for these two things to co-exist given the stringent nature of most academic institutions and the protocol in place, which can corrode relationships with participants of a vulnerable nature.

As mentioned earlier, the issue of the 'gaze' came to the fore. Brinkmann (2008) warns:

> It is an ethical challenge to the interviewer that the openness and intimacy of the interview situation can lead the respondents to disclose information they may later regret, and there is a risk that the interaction may become a quasi-therapeutic relationship. (p. 471)

This idea of the gaze is more than simply an Oxford dictionary definition; to gaze upon an object speaks about an intention and an intensity. The postcolonial gaze, however, is an objectification of those being studied in a way that does not seek to build genuine relationships or see value in any type of mutuality in the research methodology. Whilst one of the authors built relationships with those interviewed over the 5 months, *in situ*, there was always an uneasiness with the process. As mentioned above, the idea that these relationships were framed and scrutinised by being a PhD student was always simmering in the background, subtly gnawing away at the integrity of the whole process.

This was especially pertinent when interviewing guests at the supper who were long-term homeless people and/or recovering from some form of addiction (alcohol- or drug-related). Although one of the authors met those being interviewed at the supper on a number of occasions and shared a meal and conversation with them, the shift to a more formal interview scenario could be jarring. Whilst each interviewee spoke naturally and to a degree honestly, there was the awareness that the formal recording and the signing of the research ethics paperwork made them feel partially uncomfortable.[2] This awareness of the power dynamics in interview situations is important. Van der Waal (2009) reminds us that:

> [*T*]he reflexive ethnographer appreciates that they are part of a field of asymmetric relations of power. Ethnographic fieldwork requires great care in managing relationships as these may acquire privileged dimensions with ethical implications. (p. 36)

One particular issue relates to the way in which researchers' work can have the potential to further wound, traumatise or dehumanise participants who may well already be marginalised and therefore vulnerable. This is a deeply important point that has too often been overlooked. Spivak (1993) calls this a kind of epistemic violence.

Liamputtong (2010) notes:

> Because of their poverty and powerlessness, many have been coerced into research endeavours which further render them more vulnerable. At present time, we are still witnessing this. Do we, as social science researchers, have the moral obligation to provide culturally competent care to these marginalised people? (p. 17)

The attempt throughout the interviewing, and in general in all the interactions, was to be as aware as possible of these issues. In this process, the notion of a 'postcolonial gaze' is important. Bhabha (1994:132) suggests that in the 'gaze', black skin splits. The gaze functions not only as a form of epistemic violence of which Spivak speaks, but could also function as a form of academic pornography, whereby the researchers objectify those gazed upon and use their voices for stimulating their own academic careers. As Reisz (2018) recently suggested regarding Alice Goffman's (2014) book, *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*, there have been

2.The need to sign paperwork at the beginning of an interview so that we could be in line with the ethics clearance required by the university has implications for building relationships with those being interviewed (especially those who are vulnerable). We found it jarring and at times unhelpful. It seems to us that there needs to be better ways to collect this kind of information and put those being interviewed at ease.

deep 'questions of "positionality": whether a white, middle-class researcher had a right to interpret, and thereby build her academic career upon the lives of those in an impoverished black community'. This is problematic and we do not take the accusation lightly. This very article is part of the above-mentioned problem. In writing it, we are both taking steps to either beginning, or continuing to establish, some type of academic career. As we reflect, it would have probably been better in our research to deploy a much more genuinely reciprocal research methodology that would allow research participants the opportunity to help shape how the data were used, which voices came to the fore and how it was interpreted.

Conclusion

Being able to practise *sawubona* should not be taken lightly in the South African context. The practice of being human together rather than being seen in humanistic terms is important, especially if viewed through a hermeneutic of Christian mission. The notion of being human when envisioned by Saayman (2010:1) is not a nebulous universalism, but humanisation as a goal for Christian mission. Human identity formation, so disrupted, battered and dislocated throughout South African history, can find new meaning in the person and witness of Jesus Christ.

Following the work of the World Council of Churches Assembly in Uppsala in 1968, Saayman (2010) says:

> Jesus Christ, the new human being, in his joy and grief, victory and defeat, gladness and sorrow, empathy with and anger towards others, suffering and resurrection, incarnated what it means to be authentically human in relating to oneself, others, the created universe and Godself. (p. 10)

This notion of 'being human as the Creator meant us to be in the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth' is enacted partially, haphazardly and often unpredictably at the community supper. Being authentically human in this way can become the *telos* not only of the supper but also for South Africans' genuine pursuit of being human.

Moreover, the community supper's eclectic, messy and fragile becoming church allows those gathering for a meal together the opportunity to meet and eat, to practise *sawubona*, to reach out across historical divides and be hospitable in genuine. It can also help vulnerable people to detoxify religion. In an environment where vulnerable people are in need of food, there can be the potential for toxic spirituality whereby those destitute have to perform, say or do certain things to secure a plate of food. For those wishing to detox from religious performance, the supper offers an ecclesial 'grace' whereby men, women and children can explore being church without having to do certain things. This kind of posture towards those who attend the community supper actually allows for genuine journeying, which Moynagh (2017:238) describes as experiencing 'ecclesial grace'.

It might well be that the supper is a place of ecclesial graciousness that enables those in the 'shallows' an opportunity to experience grace. Regardless of where the community supper is on the journey towards being church, it offers those considered the leftovers a place to belong, be seen and be known.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

I.N. was the study leader in the project and made conceptual and structural contributions. B.A. did the literature study and wrote the article.

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Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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