



RESEARCH AS A MANGROVE

Understanding The Complexities Of Participatory Research In The Fisher Village Of Siribinha, BA, Brazil

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Abstract

Since participatory research can bolster science's relevance, deepens its analysis of contextualized knowledge, integrates a plurality of epistemic strategies, and strengthens academic work's social and political commitment and impact (Baum et al., 2006; Schinke & Blodgett, 2016), popularity for using these methods has spearheaded in recent years. Nevertheless, the extent to which participatory research can actually be emancipating, empowering, and do justice for those participating from outside academia has been much debated, criticized, and challenged from a decolonial perspective (de Sousa Santos, 2015; Tuhiwai, 1999). The messy reality in which these kinds of participatory projects intervene often seems far removed from those critical yet distant theoretical debates. Not many studies show practical examples that bridge what decolonial and just science is in theory and how it translates on the ground. By storying my experiences through auto-ethnography combined with PAR-inspired methods, I follow a transdisciplinary research group to explore what the complexities are that shape participatory research in the university-community context of Siribinha, Bahia, Brazil. Exposing to what extent participation was possible and what factors shape its participatory potential has revealed how dealing with spaces of power around positionality, the research process, and epistemological and ontological stances are crucial in shaping the participatory potential of such contexts. Additionally, academic institutional structures and competitive cultures have shown to severely limit a transformation of engagements toward more participatory practices. I also found theoretical advancements on epistemological and ontological questions, and its increasing popularity, risks overshadowed the need to instigating practices that work more closely on the social reality they aim to change, showing a theory-practice gap is also present in these more critical social theories. To overcome these challenges, mutual and self-reflexive cycles are crucial for cultivate relationships of affection, care and trust in a reciprocal manner and visa versa. These relational engagements can be powerful for encouraging much needed open dialogues within the research group as with the community, to soften the inequitable spaces of power inherent in participatory research, and narrow the rift between theorizing about participation and the human skill of engaging in it.

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Preface

Although it is with full intention, it is very much against my will to get back to my memories in Siribinha. Back in Amsterdam, far away from this Brazilian fisher village, and installed behind my self-made home office (yaay to Covid-19), I cannot neglect that part of the reason it is against my will to think back to Siribinha is the pain of missing out of the sweet water beaches hidden in the mangroves. True. But what mostly makes it painful to bring back vivid memories, is my hesitance and insecurities about the work I've done, the choices I've made, the actions I undertook, and the things I have said to Barbara, Carlos, Luciana and all the others. It makes my stomach get little noxious shocks. This is where the shoe pinches. What has my presence meant for them after all? Have I just gained what I needed? How do I really relate to Laura? And Alexandre, or Jessy? I feel a wave of shame and guilt taking over me as I uncover all the well-intended 'bad' things I've done. On the side of the researchers I wonder, how much did we collaboratively do this research? Who am I, as a privileged west-European student, to state anything about the work in Siribinha, Brazil? I've totally screwed up, and on top of that, due to covid-19, I left from one day to another, just like that. From night to day: my promises, the daily chats, my friendship and affinities, gone. Could I have made a mess of the supposed participatory research I myself was conducting while trying to discover what just and horizontal participatory research could or should look like for others?

Maybe I should let sleeping dogs lie, and just get my results together to write this bloody master thesis. Get it over with and not look back (after all how many people read a master thesis?). This questioning and struggle has become a knock-down drag-out with myself. The emotion of guilt is an inseparable part of this research experience, which I have tried to transform into the energy and dedication to make sure both groups do not turn into just names on ink and paper, but do justice to their vivid and lively nature. It was this same challenge, of translating my broad pallet of lively experiences into a thesis format, form, structure, and language, that became one of the biggest hassles. It reinforced my insecurity about my abilities as a researcher, and my capacity to write coherent, structured, and well-argued papers. And indeed, coherent writing is a mayor challenge. Possibly due to all the labels I can tick off that remind me of the fact that I work differently (perils of dyslexia, ADD, giftedness, hyper-sensibility, what else is there to add?). I have thought for many years these disabilities made me handicapped in the world of scholarly, eloquent and to the point writing intellectuals. And to a great extent it does.

However, I found, with time, and while struggling with the process of this research, and the insights it brought to the fore, that not only the ability to write well and order thoughts is what counts in research, at least not the research I am interested in. The ability to relate to others, reflect on that relation, care for others and human capacity for empathy and solidarity is at least as an essential skill for doing the kind of research that I feel is meaningful for society. I am still a young learner in those terms, and I have just started with learning how to keep a continuous reflexive and yet not paralyzing attitude towards my own actions. Still, I feel this kind of learning, one in which we continuously rediscover ourselves, reconstitute our beliefs, and are able to let them be guided by affect to keep learning, I might just have a rather okey toolkit of skills for. It is indeed understanding my own learning through relationship of care, affect and reciprocity that has driven tackling the immense challenge of writing this thesis. It is my hope to inspire a similar form of learning and rediscovery for you, when reading about my experiences, joys, difficulties and insights. Therefore, the emotion of guilt is an inseparable part of this research experience, which I've tried to transform for instigating 'political action'.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Find freedom in the context you inherit”

— Lee Maracle (Stó:lō)

The growing desire to move away from research that reinforces colonial structures has spearheaded participatory research in recent years. Classical forms of research often leave communities as mere subjects of study, weaken the autonomy of local groups (Morton Ninomiya & Pollock, 2017; Woons, 2014) and, at the same time, miss out on local approaches to global challenges and ‘wicked problems’ (J. M. Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). Participatory processes in research focus on working together *with* local communities instead of *on* or *for* local communities. Ideally, it bolsters science’s relevance, deepens its analysis of contextualized knowledge, integrates a plurality of epistemic strategies, and strengthens academic work’s social and political commitment and impact (Baum et al., 2006; Schinke & Blodgett, 2016). Consequently, this participatory approach can facilitate empowerment (empowerment that cannot be given, but only taken) of communities in their struggle to deal with real-life challenges they face in marginalized spaces. Compared to conventional forms, this approach gives space for more equitable and horizontal form of doing science. Therefore, participatory research has become increasingly important, if not mainstream, in several academic areas stretching from social and natural sciences to more inter- and transdisciplinary research. Especially the realm of sustainability studies has witnessed a growing popularity of participatory engagements in science enabling more inclusive, relevant, and practical impact (Méndez et al., 2017; Rowell et al., 2017), being ever more pertinent in the areas of development, environmental conservation, and climate change adaptation and mitigation issues (Sobral et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, the extent to which participatory research can actually be emancipating, empowering, and do justice for those participating from outside academia has been much debated, criticized, and challenged (de Sousa Santos, 2015; Tuhiwai, 1999). The challenges of bringing in and outside academia together are severe, and this struggle is all too often underestimated, showing that as a result, even good intentions regarding inclusion and participation only go so far. A main theme defining this struggle is the issue of power. Many critical scholars argue asymmetric configurations of power between those in academia and those outside of it can be conducive to certain ways of going about the process, the impacts and outcomes of doing participatory research (Muhammad et al., 2015; Schinke & Blodgett, 2016). In these collaborative contexts, and especially in university-community settings, researchers should therefore be cautious not to reproduce and reinforce oppressive (neo)colonial structures, they argue. Moreover, local epistemological and ontological stands are all too often overshadowed by the dominance of the western paradigm of science and knowledge, and therefore these well-intended participatory projects can sometimes do more harm than good for those participating from outside of academia (de Castro, 2015; de Sousa Santos, 2015; Todd, 2016). These critical bodies of work in spheres from cultural anthropology and feminist political ecology to philosophy of science have laid the groundwork for conceptions such as ‘ontological plurality’ (Blaser & De La Cadena, 2018), referring to the existence of multiple worlds, and the calls against ‘epistemicide’ (de Sousa Santos, 2015), condemning the way how dominant forms of producing knowledge have submersed and subjugated other strategies of doing the same. These discussions have sparked popular and lively conceptual debates.

Thus, participation can be a risky endeavor if these conceptual critiques are not taken seriously in the process. Yet, the messy reality in which these kinds of participatory projects intervene often seems far

removed from those critical and yet distant theoretical debates. Therefore, there is a need to look more into the empirical work of doing participatory research itself, to bring insight about how to make decolonial and, therefore more horizontal and meaningful, collaborative¹ research possible on the ground and what factors shape the participatory potential of research in such sloppy University-community settings. By storying my experiences of the following case story, I will attempt to illustrate what the complexities are that shape participatory research in a university-community context, to what extent it is possible and what factors shape this participatory potential. Most importantly, I will illustrate what this endeavor reveals about the role of (structural) power and relations in the process of perusing research with more decolonizing ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations. Before I explain how I intend to do this, and through which theoretical lens, I want to give a glimpse on what this university-community setting of Siribinha is all about and how I, as a white privileged master student, got involved with it.

1.1 SIRIBINHA & THE RESEARCH PROJECT OF THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF BAHIA (UFBA)

In a course on alternative research methods, organized by some rebellious students outside of the Wageningen University, I first heard of the fisher village of Siribinha and the project that a group of researchers of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) was engaging in. David Ludwig, my soon to become thesis supervisor, illustrated in his short presentation how knowledge integration was taking place through participatory research methods between local knowledge of fishers and scientists from the UFBA. Besides the jaw-dropping pictures of the mangroves and the hidden white-sanded beaches, something else attracted me in his presentation. It was David's critical attitude towards 'integration' of different knowledge systems and the captious connotation that he gave to the concepts 'participation', 'co-creation', 'co-research' and 'transdisciplinarity'. The combination of engaging in participatory research for conservation of the mangroves and the skepticism towards the same prompted me to chat with David afterward.

Not long after that day, I had my first video meeting with Lucas Fuentes, the professor leading the research project in Siribinha. Lucas is the head of the History, Philosophy, and Biology Teaching Laboratory² at the UFBA, and an exceptionally passionate yet open and supportive professor, pulling towards workaholic (which professor not, I guess). I remember how in our first conversation he already stated to not 'overload the community'. This mantra kept going after I arrived, added by a constant acknowledgment that 'we have to give something back to the community, not just after we are done but while working with them'. I became eager to find out if this project was the practical translation of the theoretical critiques about just and politically meaningful ways of doing research brought to the fore by political ecology, decolonial and critical feminist thinkers I had been reading for the last years. 'Are these kinds of participatory research projects the answer I am looking for?' I asked myself. This question kept me busy for the months that followed.

Siribinha is one of the best-persevered mangrove estuaries in the Northern Bahian province. In other parts of Bahia, the mangrove landscape is polluted and deteriorated due to severe environmental degradation and socio-economic threats such as the growth of tourism, agriculture, and overfishing. Although to a lesser degree, these threats also affect Siribinha and threaten local fishing and seafood

¹ I use collaborative and participative interchangeably in this document, even if, collaboration can be seen as a form of cooperation that has a more horizontal nature.

² Will be also referred to as 'lab'

gathering traditions, leaving the mangroves at risk of the same fate as the rest of the province. Currently, a decrease in the fish catch of the riverine and estuarine species has already tormented Siribinha's fishers (El-Hani & Almeida, 2010) These changes are putting the health of the local mangrove ecosystem at risk and the livelihoods and cultural heritage of the population who directly interacts and depends on this ecosystem. Most of the near 500 people that make up the population of Siribinha consider themselves native or traditional population and fishers. The fishing practices and techniques used here historically shaped cultural products influenced by both native South American and Portuguese fishing techniques. The community have been using and interacting with the mangroves for more than a century. This is portrayed by the more than ten different techniques utilized in everyday fishing practices, some of which are very ecologically sound (El-Hani & Almeida, 2010; Ludwig & El-Hani, 2020; Tng et al., 2021)

Moreover, Siribinha is a village at the crossroads where the effort and conflict over conservation and development meet. The challenge of preserving the ecosystems while attaining the community's needs, interests, and livelihoods is challenging. But the more recent growing interest in strategizing for the increase in tourism and other developmental changes (El-Hani & Almeida, 2010) makes the challenge even more perplexing. The idyllic scenery of the mangroves and the Itapicuru river flowing into the Atlantic Ocean, the by mangroves hidden white water beaches, and the fresh fish and seafood, is drawing an increasing number of tourists and eco-tourists into the area. The image of Siribinha as untouched heaven and therefore tourist destination, has become an ever-closer reality. The increase in tourism has brought many new challenges for Siribinha and the conservation of the mangroves estuary Itapicuru (El-Hani & Almeida, 2019). Different birds such as the gacici and the picerito cigano are close to extinction. However, they have still been found in the estuary, sparking extra attention of conservationists and (ethno-)biologist of the UFBA (Costa-Neto & Marques, 2000; Valderrama-Pérez et al., 2019; Tng et al., 2021) Besides, different traditional fishing and seafood gathering techniques are used that are drenched with local knowledge about the local ecosystem and can be valuable in numerable ways, such as for conservations practices, traditional medicine, ethnobotany and more (C. El-Hani & Almeida, 2010; Ludwig & El-Hani, 2020; Tng et al., 2021; Valderrama-Pérez et al., 2019).

The spaces of friction between development, tourism, and conservation also touch the governance levels in Siribinha. The municipality of Siribinha currently wants to consolidate conservation units without losing the benefits of the increase in tourism. Some of the conservation units have already been established without proper consultation or collaboration with the local community. This has prompted great resistance and distrust among community members toward the municipality, something I witnessed relatively soon with my own eyes when I arrived. Admitting to the demands of community members, the future units are planned to be established with the help of a team of researchers of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), under the head of professor Lucas Fuentes. This brings the UFBA team³, and the project as a whole in a kind of role of mediator between the community and the municipality. In here, the UFBA does not only mediate the conservation policies that are planned to be established but also attempts to support the community in their challenges in terms of development and tourism.

The project in Siribinha started in 2016, and over time its aim developed three-folded. The first aim of the project was to bring together science and traditional knowledge and revalorize traditional knowledge in local education systems. Secondly, the group operating in Siribinha started to function

³ With UFBA team I refer to the researchers within the ethno-Siribinha project that I have most interacted with the community and whom I have joint and observed in their research

as a mediating force between the community and the municipality to establish better conservation policies. And last, the aim has been to give a real-time return to the community, collectively establishing an eco-museum that should ultimately ensure the livelihoods of some of the fishers. The project has grown in various directions since 2016, making it an extensive interdisciplinary and even transdisciplinary project with several professors, post-docs, master students, and graduates involved coming from very diverse disciplines. On top of the main goals, smaller projects take place as well. For example, researchers give workshops on collective action and participatory decision-making, and give bird-watch training to community fishers to help them to learn about the birds around, of whom some are very rare, and to teach them how to become eco-tour guides.

I dream away into the future of my research and see mysterious thick and crumbling mangroves roots, that seem always to possess, hide and protect valuable treasures or answers to complex questions. From the outside, a mangrove estuary is the point of intersection between different worlds. The saline rough sea world and the world of sweet water rivers. The space where anaerobic and aerobic species meet. Above all, it is a space where these different worlds find each other, where they might struggle for a bit, before they become integrated with one another. The function of the mangroves as a mediator of this intersection can be spectacular to witness, and it seems hard to fathom how the mangroves get it done. The UFBA team is trying to be a mediator between different worlds as well. Mediating the world of the asymmetrical power configuration between academics, the municipality, and their interests, and the interests of the community of Siribinha. Likewise, it tries to mediate between conservation interests and development and tourism interests. Besides, the UFBA team tries to navigate the intersection where traditional knowledge and other epistemic and/or ontological stands collide with Western-dominated academic knowledge. Most importantly, like mangroves deaden the overwhelming affects that sea storm or sea level rises have on the land and its ecosystems, the UFBA team attempts to fulfill a similar role softening the negative impact of unequal power that, next to the conservation of the estuary itself, drives many challenges that lie before Siribinha and its people. As with mangroves, it all looks marvelous from the outside, and, looking from a distance, it is spectacular to witness how all these aims and role are combined. Still, it isn't until you truly enter in the mangroves that you see what struggles come with it, and how easy it is to get stuck in the mud when trying to meddle between these worlds.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIMS

I had learned before starting my thesis that although at first glance participatory projects seem to be ideal for preventing symbolic violence, epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 2015) and further marginalization of local communities (Long et al., 2016) and it can help increase self-determination of traditional communities (Escobar, 2016; Healy, 2019) and mutual benefits (Berkes, 2004; Campbell & Vainio-Mattila, 2003), it appears that abstract theory is not that easily translated into the messiness of everyday reality (Long et al., 2016a; McNiff & Whitehead, 2009; Smith et al., 2010). Indeed, a lot is written in theory about these issues, but fewer studies link them to practical examples that show that decolonial and just science is possible on the ground. In addition, reading Muhammad et al., (2015), Schinke & Blodgett (2016), Wallerstein et al., (2020), Smith (2010) and (Tuhivai, 1999) I figured that often inclusion in participatory research only goes so far because the power of academic institutions and the power dynamics they bring along are inevitable. Therefore, various ethical dilemmas and conflicts may arise when engaging in the 'praxis' of participatory research (Freire, 1970; McNiff & Whitehead, 2009; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017), which refers to the actions of the theory in practice (Freire, 1970).

This concern led me to carve my initial, broad but relatively simple, main research question:

What are the main complexities that shape participatory research in Siribinha?

With this central question, I attempted to unravel the complexities, including the biggest challenges and virtues, that come about when engaging (or attempting) to engage in this participatory praxis? At the same time, I investigate if this project could be the practical translation of the theoretical aspirations for just and decolonial engagements and collaborations with communities in science. Could this be the praxis (Freire, 1996) of participatory research? And to answer this main question, I started with a more descriptive sub question:

What are the UFBA teams' and the communities' motivations, interest, strategies and practices shaping the research project in Siribinha?

Here, I describe my empirical experience of 'how it is done', by first giving more insights into the UFBA teams' aspirations as well the context of the community of Siribinha, and consequently explain what practices I saw in action. Afterwards, I explored;

To what extent are these research engagements participatory?

For this answer I mirrored the practices I found with practices of participatory action research (PAR) and their conceptualizations of what participation is, since in my understanding, they bring on of the most progressive experience-based literature on participation. These results instigated a more interesting and constructive question;

What factors influence the possible degree of participation?

Last, I tried to discover why practices and strategies on the ground were like they were and what factors play a crucial role in shaping these practices. Going beyond the analysis of the degree of participation and understanding its' complexity, enabled me to highlight what lessons can be learned for better participatory practices. Altogether, I found that there are dynamic and more structural factors that shape the extent to which participation is possible, and that these factors consequently shape how the UFBA team translates the theoretical and conceptual ambitions of participation to its more sloppy reality. Delving further into this complex context revealed insights about the role of power in participative practices, how to better engage with inequities on the ground by focusing on relations, and how to address these relations within the sequence that unfolds between theory building and the actual act of doing participatory research.

The groundwork that participatory action research (PAR) has laid for the translation of conceptual ideas of participation to the actual practice, has guided the analysis of participatory approaches in this study. Therefore beyond the acknowledging of participation as a scale (somewhat legitimizing partial forms of participation), for my thesis I conceptualize participation from its understanding in PAR. In my view, this brings progressive and useful guidance for dealing with the power inequities, dilemmas, privileges, and ethical inquiries that take a foreground in this messy reality (Schinke & Blodgett, 2016) and therefore this approach has been well married with indigenous and other decolonizing methodologies (Reich et al., 2017; Susana Caxaj, 2015). This more practical, participatory and liberating (Freire, 1970) way of doing science has turned science and its epistemological, axiological and methodological practices on its axes. With this in mind, I will take PAR theory and methodological practices as guidance for my study and experience of the (participatory) research quest of a group of researchers at the Biology Institute of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA).

In the pages that follow I intend to illustrate the landscape of participatory research of the UFBA team in Siribinha by firstly describing what I have witnessed and the actions I took, and secondly by

interweaving my experience with theory. By delineating the complexity inherent of these research projects within university-community settings I will attempt to enrich the reader's understanding of participatory research and propose ways to deal with this complexity. Portraying my own personal storyline that follows me from the time I arrived in Salvador, Bahia up until now, one and a half years later, I partly create a chronological story. The reason for telling the story chronologically is to stick more to my personal subjective experience of the research and become more sensitive to the changes over time. I let the UFBA-team and the community speaks for themselves as much as possible, not only to portray more contextualized stories but also to make these characters come more to life.

Before starting this story, I will first shortly position this endeavor in the theoretical debates that have inspired me. These have partly guided my way of engaging in this research from the beginning. In continuation, I will explain what methodological considerations are necessary for this kind of insider-outsider research practices and where and how I position myself. After having situated this endeavor methodologically, I will bring more contextual and empirical stories forward that illustrate the context within which researchers engaged with the community of Siribinha, and what approaches I saw in the field. These stories can help explain the different dynamics at play (including my own), painting the contours of the landscape of research in Siribinha. This section will be followed by a deeper analysis of the extent of participation that unfolded and what as factors are most determining for doing more substantial participation. In this last section I will add another round of reflection in which I mirror my findings to the theoretical foundations that inspire these transdisciplinary projects and practical kinds of engagement that aim to bring science closer to society.

2. A SHORT THEORETICAL POSITIONING

"Ideological doctrine of scientific methods and all the philosophical verbiage about epistemology were cooked up to distract our attention from getting the know the world effectively by practicing the sciences.

From this point of view, science - the real game in town- is rhetoric, a series of efforts to persuade relevant social actors that one's manufactured knowledge is a route to desired from of very objective power."

- Donna Haraway

To analyze the process of participatory practices in this transdisciplinary research project, I take inspiration from Participatory Action Research (PAR). This approach offers insights into what participatory research is on the ground and into the pitfalls and recurring dilemmas when one engages in science, particularly when direct relations with other communities are involved. Following the call for liberation of science (Freire, 1970) and urge for real popular science (Smith, 2012; 408 referring to Borda 151), I aim to further delve into the 'praxis' of participatory and transdisciplinary research. Praxis is conceptually understood here as theory in action, and action translated into theory. Freire's ideas on science and education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) have, besides other things, been one of the most influential in challenging the separation between theory and practice and between the academy and society, acknowledging the interdependence and integration of practice, research, thought and action. This notion of 'praxis', has guided my way of organizing my experience and writing.

Hence, to bring about the necessary background to understand PAR and the 'praxis' I refer to, I will start presenting a short overview of the theoretical strands that initially prompted my interest for participatory research and that are the theoretical foundations of my work. In later chapters, I will further delve into these theories and intertwine them with my experience of the same in an iteratively manner, staying close to the way I moved between theory and practice repeatedly on the ground in Brazil. By interweaving theory and practice in this thesis and engaging in 'praxis' as much as the wordily translation of my experiences into ink on a paper allows me to, I will make an attempt to deconstruct theory-practice binaries.

For the following theoretical positioning, I will first quickly touch upon PAR as a set of methods, which are grounded in epistemological stands different from conventional research practices. Secondly, I will shortly touch upon a theoretical and conceptual strand that has prompted the development of PAR, and has instigated reflection of the place that Eurocentric science and research has taken in society. I gather these theories that are critical towards science under the umbrella of Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) and further explain how alternative ways of going about research, focusing on relationality, can drive more meaningful scientific practices that work more closely with, and on, the social reality they attempt to change. Understanding these main conceptions, enables a better understanding the drive for 'praxis' in science as done in PAR comes from.

2.1 PAR AS A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO SCIENCE

Since the 1970's, PAR has gained increasing legitimacy, and PAR projects have been conducted in various disciplines, from environmental sciences, ecology, and resource management (Mendez et al., 2017) to sociology, ethnographic research, political sciences and educational science (McTaggart et al., 2017). Simply put, PAR is "rooted in politics, power, participation, and a deep appreciation of knowledge, created in conditions of oppression and mobilized for social action" (Fine & Torre, 2019, p. 433). In PAR, researchers and participants collectively set out the issue to be studied and possibilities

for positive change contrary to conventional research where the illusion and obsession with objectivity and neutrality drive researchers to distance themselves from that what is analyzed and from those who are, or with whom is, researched. The relational PAR approach, focused on relationships, proximity, and affect, has challenged conventional learning methods and ways of doing research (Baum et al., 2006; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). The main idea, to include community members and all other participants to be an integral part of the research process as a whole, has been one of the main theses of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Freire (1970). This work inspired many academics and non-academics, and students like myself to engage in a more collaborative form of research. It has also been an inspiration for other thinkers such as Fals-Borda (1987), who have turned ordinary research methodology and epistemology on its head. These writers are identified as anti-colonial and liberation theorists that had many social movements in the Global South as a backbone, particularly in Latin America. Their ideas on the possibility for real popular science aim not to replicate dominant (colonial) discourses, and on the contrary, break the object-subject or researcher-researched dichotomy, and revolutionize the possibility for local realities and voices to become autonomous agents of the research process (Smith et al., 2010). Because of its focus on relationships and how it understands subjective and situated bits of knowledge as only existent on the basis of the relationships it has with its surroundings, PAR has often also been associated with feminist approaches to these oppressing conventional research practices (Fine & Torre, 2019).

Moreover, PAR induces more complex, nonlinear and context-specific thinking that goes beyond solving merely day-to-day challenges and can also address global challenges in the local environment. This 'glocal' approach, is especially well suited for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research (Greenwood et al., 1998; Mendez et al., 2017) addressing these 'wicked problems', many present in conservation contexts such as in Siribinha, that work towards intertwining ecological and social issues. Inter- and transdisciplinary PAR processes facilitate the integration of various knowledge systems. For example, by privileging the expertise of non-academics that otherwise are often marginalized (Sousa Santos, 2015; Walsh, 2007; Elmhirst, 2018) or misused in conventional research processes (Nadesky, 2008; Long et al., 2016). In fact, these transdisciplinary processes are at the crossroads where aims for the inclusion of local and traditional knowledge and their holders meet the objective of creating more rigorously melting science with practice (Mendez et al., 2017). This eases a path for decolonization of science and its form of knowledge production methodologies (Tuhiwai, 1999) or as Fals Borda (1991) liked to state, it can create the ontological possibility for real popular science (Smith, 2012: 408, referring to Fals Borda, 191: 151). The misconception often prevails that PAR is simply a methodology, yet it in its most critical form is an epistemology, theory of knowledge, fundamentally challenging who an expert is, what is taken as knowledge. This naturally demands a different way of going about research designs and questions that naturally require alternative methodological practices (Fine & Torre, 2019). Currently, PAR has become widespread, particularly for those aiming to do more hybrid forms of research that are conceptual while engaging in the praxis, positively impacting the realities of those living in the circumstances or spaces studied (Bacon et al., 2005).

In the next chapter, I will elaborate on how PAR has inspired my methodological strategies, decisions, and helped reflecting on the dilemmas I encountered in practice. But for now, it is vital to place this research in the theoretical discussions that have pillared and motivated the advancement of this differentiated way of thinking and doing research. This array of theoretical perspectives are best integrated under the umbrella of Feminist Political Ecology (FPE).

2.2 FEMINIST POLITICAL ECOLOGY (FPE)

Critical feminist and political ecological insights have laid the groundwork for PAR and motivated its further development, as a way of doing science, and thinking about knowledge production radically different from conventional academic culture prescribes (Sultana, 2020). FPE brings critical feminist perspectives, epistemologies and methodology into conversation with analysis of ecological,

economic, and political power relations known from political ecology, to motivate a more intersectional (Davis, 2008), reflexive and situated (Haraway, 1988), 'strongly objective' (Harding, 2015) and decolonial way (Smith, 1999) of engaging in research. FPE emerged in the 1990s and was influenced namely by critiques brought forward by diverse critical feminist strands of thought. It has shown common grounds with some more progressive lines of political ecology taking critical stances on capitalism, patriarchy, globalization, extractivism, enclosures, colonialism, development, and various forms of interconnected oppressions and injustices (Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019; Sultana, 2021). Incited by increasing calls to pluralize our epistemologies, and the growing determination to decolonize academia, FPE has challenged what counts as 'the canon' in academic knowledge (Sultana, 2021, p. 156) FPE has eloquently gathered not only a critical analysis of the current state of knowledges and science but also fed into more practical alternatives of how to engage differently providing various tools for analyses that are less theoretical (Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019). FPE most adequately brings the uneven and sometimes oppressive relationships to attention that shape the work of academics, despite the signs of good will of these academics to engaging in liberal or anti-oppressive approaches (de Sousa Santos, 2009). FPE continues to evolve, to be inclusive of, and accountable to, different constituencies and epistemological framings.

2.3 A HISTORICAL POLITICAL FOUNDATION

Many critical feminists, as well as political ecology scholars, start their argument historically with the idea of 'the coloniality of knowledge' (Leff, 2015; Escobar, 2006: 2013, Haraway, 1988; Longino, 1990; Walsh, 2007), which highlights that dominant idea on what the world is, how we can know the world and how we can obtain knowledge from it, have marginalized other knowledge systems and those holding them (de Sousa Santos, 2015). Escobar and Mignolo (2007) have expanded on the idea of Quijano, published back in 1989, that linked the coloniality of power, and how that plays out in the political and economic spheres, with the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2007; Mignolo & Escobar, 2013). The basic premise is that knowledge is colonialized (Smith, 2013; Sundberg, 2014). Leff (2015; 48) explains what this entails stating "decolonization of knowledge leads scholars to inquire how Eurocentric ideas, stretching from ancient Greek philosophy to modern Western science and technology, were introduced to traditional societies and cultures in Latin America through conquest colonization and globalization. This process entailed the systematic subversion of indigenous modes of thinking, productive practices and cultural life-worlds, which were belittled as being the antithesis of 'modernity' and 'progress.'".

At the same time, and later on, the 'use' of local knowledge started to become increasingly celebrated to inform policies, strategies and practices. The fact that these knowledge systems can strongly diverge from euroamerican ideas of what the world, has often seemed subsidiary for those using these knowledges. Consequently, frictions occur when western academic knowledge and its institutions interact with non-academic collaborators. This subsidiarity is showcased when the use, valorization and integration of knowledge from local communities is ripped out of its context by using only that fraction of knowledge that is deemed useful (Nadasdy, 1999), or that already correlates with scientist knowledge and with the knowledge of those 'experts' concerned with conservation or touristic development (Berkes, 2017; Büscher & Fletcher, 2015). This risks reproducing and reinforcing (neo)colonial structures in the powerplay between those 'discovering' local knowledge or 'using' it for policy purposes, and those entrenched in local knowledge as part of their ways of being (Sundberg, 2014; Todd, 2016; Walsh, 2007). Moreover, often in these processes, no reciprocal relationship is present that can likewise attend to the needs and demands of that same community.

This exposes just a glimpse of the grapple that exists when knowledge is integrated from different positions of power. Therefore, also in participatory and transdisciplinary research with local

communities these configurations of power, that are often asymmetric, are conducive to certain outcomes and ways of going about the process of doing participatory research (something that is deeply understood by PAR practitioners). Although best intentions are habitually present, science and research are often done over the back of those epistemic communities that already have marginal social and political self-determination. As a consequence, this kind of research facilitates the further disregard of the demands, interests, epistemic strategies of these communities (de Sousa Santos, 2015). Therefore, we should seek to dismantle “the systems of internalized and externalized colonial praxis” to decolonialize our minds, bodies and ways of doing research (Leff, 2015; 652; Smith, 2017). Both feminist and critical political ecologist traditions have politicized science in respect to the issue of knowledge and being, bringing not only the privilege of western or academic science to light, but also placing that privilege in a historical neo-colonial context.

Others like Savransky (2017), Escobar (2013) Viveiros de Castro (Holbraad et al., 2014) and Blaser (2013) have criticized the focus on merely epistemology, premising that there can be no politics of knowledge without politics of reality. This premise refers to the ontological base that exists under epistemological strategies and the political power that such ontology exerts over other forms of knowing and being (Blaser, 2013). Since there are different ideas of what the world is, different ontologies exist about the world and what it entails. This again constitutes how we can know, and what empirical strategies we can use to know about what the world is (Pedersen, Morten Axel and Viveiros de Castro, 2014). Political ontologies refer to the power that plays a role facilitating the domination of one ontology above the other. I will use an understanding of ontology where sociological and political views are more deeply rooted. In my view, ontological positions have an insidious political nature that wants to put a certain idea forward about ‘how things should be’ (Pedersen, Morten Axel and Viveiros de Castro, 2014). Ontological difference for me therefore refers to understanding how ontologies and epistemologies have a political foundation, and what that foundation is. Therefore, the political interactions in which ways of knowing, and of enacting in the world are constantly contested and rubbed against each other in a playing field full of power relations is the approach to ontology adopted for this thesis (de la Cadena & Blaser, 2018; Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017; Blaser, 2013).

Getting back to the idea of ‘praxis’, where I started this brief theoretical positioning, many of these elaborate and refined arguments made by political ecological scholars bring about less practical features on how decolonializing looks like and what alternative ways of research would actually be more appropriate. Similarly, a lot has been written on how, in this context, communities should gain the possibility to increase their self-determination in ontological, epistemological, as well as socio-political terms, but little examples show how one can engage in research that achieves those aims and what methodology and methods should be used on the ground. This is particularly the sphere where critical feminist ethos has complemented the initial critiques of political ecologists, and it is this approach to science and methodology that has inspired me during my experiences in this research.

2.4 DIFFERENT SCIENCE, DIFFERENT EPISTEMOLOGIES, DIFFERENT METHODOLOGY

Drawing from feminist ethics that foreground research processes, politics, outcomes, and impacts, current FPE scholarship has been aware of the power relations involved in research, and the consequent difficulty of engaging in ‘praxis’ in PAR and other participatory research endeavors. As a response to this account, and to go beyond merely problematizing current science practices, many feminist political ecologists employ a relational approach to research (McNamee, 2010; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017; Sultana, 2021). In this approach, one’s identity, positionality and privilege are fore fronted alongside the urge to know the ‘other’, and develop affective relationship around care. These

relational approaches are seen as crucial to deal with ethical dilemmas and friction of difference in the field (Smith 1991, 2013; Sundberg, 2003; Sultana, 2007). Thus, within relationality as main theory, and its connected epistemology and methodology, increasing emphasis is given to issues of objectivity in science, situated knowledges, positionality, subjectivities, emotions, and ethics of care and affection (Crasnow, 2013; Gerlach, 2018). With it, tracing issues of difference and dealing with these productive tensions, not to smoothen them, but to explain and enact a more complex world making. I have been mostly guided by the ideas of situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988), subjectivities (Cahill, 2007; Lugones, 2010) and 'strong objectivity' (Harding, 2015), as well as emotional, affective and reflective research (Smith, 1991; 2013; Gerlach, 2018; McNamee, 2010; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). These concepts have also informed the latest critical PAR developments, and therefore I will briefly touch upon the main arguments that relate to these concepts.

Many critical feminists argue that well situated and positioned research can more adequately question relational privileges, struggles and differences in scholarly research (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2015; Longino, 1993). A prerequisite for this kind of research is a critical vision on science, particularly the objectivity in science and its positivistic tradition. Critical feminist strands, such as standpoint theorists, have refuted the idea of 'neutral' or 'objective' research as a whole (Longino, 1993; Harding, 2015). All the social locations or positions from where humans form opinions are always informed by personal and situated experiences and are therefore somewhat biased by default. Researchers make no exception to that, and therefore the ultimate search for objectivity in research, which has marked mainstream academic science, is one in vain. As Donna Haraway showed in her earlier work, the utopia of objectivity in science creates the illusion of the 'god trick'. The illusion of being able to have eyes from nowhere. "...All seems not just mythically about the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere, but to have put the myth into ordinary practice" (Haraway, 1988, p. 581). 'Objective' gets too often understood as independent from subjectivity and society. Yet, there is no existence of one true referent for objectivity because it depends on the context in which science is done. Recognizing this lack of a fixed point of reference for objectivity makes its use more of a buzz word to improve the rightness of whatever is discussed without any actual reason for it, Harding (2015) argues.

It is important to note how the impossibility of 'standpoint-free objectivity' on itself has been kept quiet for many years. The idea of the existence of value-neutrality must therefore also be seen in a political context. Harding (2015) illustrates this historical account, by explaining how knowledge has been pushed into disciplinary (male-driven) categories of knowledge which has driven certain topics for scientific inquiry while other topics that encompassed daily and societal relevance from a women's point of view were neglected, rejected and not funded. The same goes for other types of knowledges, with different epistemic and or ontological world views than Western induced kind of knowledges (Harding, 2015). Yet, this form of science as usual, has harmed not only women and communities with different epistemic strategies than the Western hegemonic ones, but it has simultaneously robbed science from being able to more accurately understand, portray and analyze the world (Harding, 2015). The critical analysis of science and philosophy of science, is left within its own circle, that further empowers privileged knowledge systems and therefore blinds other realities (Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1997; Wylie & Sismondo, 2015) that can potentially be more meaningful for society.

Thus, the outcomes of such a 'god trick' of standpoint-independence are reflected in day-to-day lives of oppressed groups who are exposed to social and political policies stemming from a supposed value-free science that encourages their marginalization (Crasnow, 2013). It is because of this reason,

that socially and politically disadvantaged people are often in best conditions to understand and analyze from outside of the dominant conceptual frameworks and privileged knowledge systems, since they themselves, have been forced to work within these dominant frameworks (Harding, 2015). By valorizing the perspectives uniquely available to those who are socially and politically disadvantaged, and demonstrating the situatedness of knowledge and knowledge claims, critical feminist theory has contributed to research and practice that empowers and promotes social and ecological transformation for women as well as other marginalized groups (Elmhirst, 2018(Rose, 1997)). With it, taking a radically different idea from the more conventional forms of epistemology in science.

Within this epistemology, natural bias, subjectivity, or well outlined situatedness of knowledges, are not seen as a weakness but rather a strength that can uncover more about a certain reality. The more subjectivities I take into account, the more understanding I gain of what these complexly interdependent phenomena are like and how they behave. Thus, subjective knowledge claims do not hamper good research, as argued by Haraway (1988), Harding (2015) and Ramazanoğlu & Holland (2002), on the contrary, they aim at producing 'socially robust' rather than classical 'scientifically objective' knowledge. Revealing and compiling many of these different (subjective) standpoints could together actually create something called 'strong objectivity', that brings understanding of the situatedness of knowledges while setting steps to approximate objective kind of knowledge that engender a better quality of science (Harding, 2015). Although Longino (1993) conceptualizes this issue from more social epistemological perspective, both Harding (2015) and Longino (1993) overlap in their ideas about the inexistence of value-free science and that for real useful objectivity in science a diversity of perspectives, beliefs and values need consideration, as she puts it "in contrast to the knower characterized by static objectivity, true objectivity does not seek power over phenomena but acknowledges instead the ways in which knower and phenomena are in relationship as well as the ways in which phenomena themselves are complexly interdependent" (Longino, 1993, p. 108).

Researchers should therefore stop being uncomfortable about having a subjective position, and rather work on making those positions more and more explicit. Here, the perfect researcher is not an unconditioned being, but rather one that is very much conditioned by living an everyday context (of social and political oppression). As Haraway states (1988), I also feel we need to find a balance between acknowledging the doctrine of dominant positions on objectivity while not falling in complete relativism or skepticism, and trying to show commitment to accounts of the world out there (Haraway, 1988).

Hence, with these arguments, critical feminist scholars have formed a foundation for 'starting research from the margins' and increasing the plurality of perspectives and experiences that can be used in scientific research (Longino, 1993; Wylie & Sismondo, 2015), uncovering the ways in which the institutions and products of science are inflected by systemic inequity (Wylie & Sismondo, 2015) and learning to engage differently in science. This is what translates to the search for strong objectivity, situated knowledges, and subjectivities that have brought about epistemological and methodological insights that expose rigorous and robust comprehension of the world but also insights on how to change it, creating a more relevant kind of science with actual effects for those more marginalized groups in society (Longino, 1993; Crasnow, 2009; Harding, 2015).

These approaches to research marry very well with (transdisciplinary) PAR (Baum et al., 2006; Ernesto Méndez et al., 2013; Long et al., 2016). PAR practices rely upon situating knowledge, strong-objectivity, and researching through relations while not losing sight on the power dynamics that take

place. As such, it brings a much needed hands-on guidance (instead of theoretical guidance) of how to take these issues seriously on the ground to truly engage in more feminist and decolonial research. Still, not surprisingly, when transformed into practice these PAR guidelines touch areas of discomfort for many scientists who are trying to maintain 'objectivity'. Seeing the PAR process through rose-colored glasses, and understanding its promise, can be inspiring for researchers as it can be frightening when PAR relationships are established, because they know that the presumed roles, procedures and values that they are used to in the university context will not serve them well in this new endeavor (Hall & Tandon, 2017; Smith et al., 2010). PAR can create very uncomfortable processes and spaces of friction for scholarly trained researchers (Méndez et al., 2017). Academically trained researchers, like myself and those within the UFBA team, might not be prepared to deal with these conceivably rather overpowering effects and therefore could be left susceptible and unprotected (Smith et al., 2010). Apart from this challenge, academically trained researchers struggle with the procedural restrictions of the academy. In the chapter "the odds of participation" I will further elaborate on these challenges and give examples of how these practical guidelines can spawn more decolonizing practices on the ground.

3. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

"Methods to investigate real issues are objects of research and theory building in their own right. However simple or technical they may seem, inquiry methods are forged in the fire of ideas regarding the world and ways to deal with its complexity. As the world evolves, so too must the methods and practice of science"

- Chevalier & Buckler (2013)

The problem under scrutiny in this thesis, is as much a practical, as a theoretical, and a methodological problem and therefore, I tend to bring insights in all three of these aspects. I aim to get a grip on how researchers work in the context of Siribinha, to what extent it is participatory, and what that analysis reveals about the factors that shape the participatory potential of such transdisciplinary projects. By relating the observed practices of research to theories about the participatory research such as PAR, I focus on the power dynamics that inevitably are part of this process, especially in university-community settings. At the same time, I investigate how empirical data that I have collected might make me reevaluate the relevance of these theories by adding, contradicting or by bringing more nuance to their main arguments. Therefore, this study will interweave inductive and deductive approaches, and bring them in conversation with each other. In conjunction with the latter, I did not only investigate this (practical, theoretical and methodological) problem, but simultaneously engaged with it, acted on it, and tried to transform it for positive change. I have tried to engage in 'praxis' (Freire, 1970) myself in some parts of this endeavor by enacting theory in practice along the way of the research. Even if this undertaking is challenging, and I might have not fully lived up to that aim, I believe that I have set significant steps towards that course. In this process I uncovered methodological and theoretical contributions that this case study brings forward, grounding participatory guidelines, ideals and conceptions, in the practice of it on the ground.

With regard to the portrayal of this experience in ink and paper, I sought not to illustrate my empirical work, the theory, and the methodology siloed, but rather portray them as different aspects of the same issue that are in constant conversation with each other and are deeply interdependent. That is why I have crossbred my empirical data, the theory and parts of my methodology in this document, writing it closer to 'praxis' as well. Moreover, this design is rather exploratory, meaning I will not aim to provide solely a conclusive answer to the research questions, but rather explore the specific aspects and insights of the research area through these questions. Investigating these issues while engaging in several actions myself requires a flexible research design that can change certain strategies according to the needs of, and access to, the communities and researchers. Altogether, the iterative process of moving back and forth between questions, methods, results and theory, and the span of 1,5 year within which I have gathered and reconsidered my data, have made a 'live' document of this study.

3.1 PAR AS GROUNDWORK FOR THIS METHODOLOGICAL RATIONALE

The methodological rationale for this study got inspired by critical PAR and its interweaved feminist methodologies, and these have driven and changed my own approaches to participation along the road. As I delved deeper into the Brazilian context, and I was further drawn into these inspiring

methodologies, I started to not only use PAR as referent for the most ideal kind of participation but simultaneously started to integrate PAR elements in my own work. At the same time, due my movement between the various roles I had in this study my investigation ended up being an auto-ethnography, looking at the larger context wherein self-experiences occur (Muhammed, 2015). In contrast to mere ethnographic work, my inspiration from PAR and feminist methodologies motivated me to engage in constant critical reflexive learning-cycles, and it additionally motivated my action for social change (also within the academy).

Contrary to merely participatory research, PAR generates transformative activities and action to evoke social change and social justice. It reconnects theory, methods and real-life issues by engaging scientists and non-scientists alike in making sense of these real-life situations while at the same time acting on them (Buckler, 2013; Kemmis et al., 2014). Recent debates in PAR literature show the tensions between PAR practitioners about what is and what is not PAR. As with participation, PAR is not really a uniform phenomenon (Buckler, 2013; Chevalier & Buckler, 2013) and it is a gradual system (Baum et al., 2006). The goals for engaging in PAR can be multiple and may vary. Some PAR projects develop solely to address real-life issues, using science to achieve collective goals without the obligation or intention of advancing science and advancing on general knowledge in a particular field (Chevalier & Buckler, 2013). Other variants engage to advance science and theory building while tackling real-life issues bringing science closer to society for social change in a more political way (Chevalier & Buckler, 2013). In fact, the differences that PAR process can have in terms of their orientation (for example internal or external, personal or collective), scale (local or societal) and frequency (episodic or systemic), are all shaped by the context and intentions of all the participants. Considering that these intentions might differ in different contexts, PAR has a plurality of ways of coming about.

Despite this plurality, PAR has overlapping features too such as; the focus on inflicting social change that promotes democracy and challenges inequality and inequities; the context-specific approach; the way it targets the needs of the particular group it collaborates with; and most importantly, the aims to 'liberate' those participating to become more conscious and aware of their own situatedness to take action (Baum et al., 2006; Freire, 1970). Another common ground within PAR approaches, although sometimes framed in varying terms, is the reflective cycle involving looking, reflecting, acting and sharing (Bacon et al., 2005). The stages do not necessarily follow a chronological order, but each phase plays a significant role in the process itself. These phases, often referred to as 'cycles' require the collaborative development of the problem or issue to be addressed and acted upon, and the constant reconsideration of these issues. In this process PAR does not only develop the required guidelines for the investigation, but ultimately also offers a degree of self-revelation for the researcher itself (Chevalier & Buckler, 2013).

Moreover, data is often collected collaboratively and it is discussed in these reflexive cycles wherein results and reflections are constantly intertwined and shared amongst all the participants. The sharing of knowledge and the openness in sharing jointly collected data is essential for this kind of participatory aims (Böschen et al., 2020). Crossing the boundaries of knowledge sharing (Böschen et al., 2020), collectively forming the PAR process and its aims (J. M. Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; Smith et al., 2010; Stanton, 2014) and letting go of the obsession with objectivity (Fine & Torre, 2019), are common ideals in PAR (Kemmis et al., 2014; Méndez et al., 2017). Ideally PAR tends to blurry the line between academic researchers and non-academic participants until the researched become the researchers (Baum et al., 2006). Ironically, in my study, those that I initially researched, are already academic researchers themselves conducting research in Siribinha. Therefore, at first sight it fits a lot with the ethnographic work that critically examines the sociology of the academy as done by Latour

and Woolgar (2013) and other STS scholars (Latour & Woolgar, 2013; Sismondo, 2010). Yet, albeit some overall auto-ethnographic methods, I also have a three-fold relationship with PAR.

Firstly, I have used PAR as an inspiration for my analysis of the practices I observed and joined with the UFBA team, using it as a theoretical framework to mirror these experiences. Secondly, as highlighted before, PAR helped me to engage with participatory facets of my research in an action-centered way more generally, employing a reiterative process of looking, reflecting, acting and sharing to some degree with the UFBA team as well as the community of Siribinha (Bacon et al., 2005). Thirdly, the research and activities that I have got involved in with the community did not start as a PAR but slowly more strongly developed into one. A PAR that was solely set to address real-life issues of an oil spill disaster that had devastated the northern coasts of Bahia, in this PAR the purpose was using science (and its resources) to achieve collective goals without advancing science or general knowledge (Chevalier & Buckler, 2013). As these collective actions and developments were not driven by the research questions of my study, these actions are not part of my methodology.

3.2 RELATIONAL APPROACH

I took relationality, and subjectivity as core commitments in this research while I moved between different roles. My role with the UFBA team was very different from the role I played in the community of Siribinha, and therefore, the degree of resonance and participation differs amongst these two groups. However, the choices I made in my own engagement with both groups were similarly inspired by researching in, and through, relations as common in critical PAR. Relationality as a methodology (Brayboy, 2012), and researching-in-relations (McNamee, 2010; San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017), drives me to understand, situate, feel and communicate my experience through my personal involvement, and it facilitates me to be reflexive and explicit about how power and privilege within those relations works.

Relational research is research as a process of fostering relationships (Gerlach, 2018; McNamee, 2010). The affective relationship that one starts to develop with other participants can facilitate the human capacity to listen, story with, and care about each other, jointly establishing more inclusive, interconnected and decolonizing methodologies (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017; Tuhiwai, 1999). Relational methodologies should therefore drive inner discovery (Hall & Tandon, 2017). As Professor Tremblay, in one of the case studies of Hall and Tandon (2017, p. 17) citing Tremblay, 2017) explains "Methods such as CBR [community-based research], PAR [participatory action research] and other CUE [community– university engagement] approaches often inspire these types of inner discovery, and mutual learning – changing the way we see ourself and each other". Instead of focusing on objectively engaging with those involved in research, we as researchers, should shape experiences of shared and differentiated subjectivity (Harding, 2015). We need to understand our own possibility for, and position in, collaborative research, and how this again shapes and polishes shared and unshared experiences or subjectivities. In this process one's self-understanding as researcher is reevaluated and reconstructed, involving self-and mutual learning rather than merely self-reflection.

Following Smith et al., (2010), I believe researchers (as myself) should aim to connect as humans with others involved in research not as merely researchers (Smith et al, 2010). Lykes (1997, p. 729) puts it very concisely, "PAR should mirror the readiness to risk entering to someone else's life and therefore granting that other person to enter one's own". Because I have entered the lives of the UFBA team as well as the community members in Siribinha, it is essential to position myself within this network of relations and research landscapes that are often intrinsically uneven and unjust. Privileges and statuses should thus be open for investigation in a truly transparent manner, because this 'difference' or 'otherness' affects the group members, your relationship with them, as well as the process of

knowledge-sharing (Hall and Tandon, 2006). As Smith et al., (2010: 423) concludes from her PAR experience "As community co-researchers grapple with local issues and analyze their socio historical implications, university researchers do not have a license to stand by as observers or commentators or even supporters – their own individual social identities and statuses, and the impact of these within the work of the PAR team, must be open to exploration" (Smith et al., 2010, p. 423). The friendship that developed with UFBA members as well as with the community existed parallel to the process of sharpening the direction of my research, therefore it is impacted by these relations as well. Through open discussion of these relations, I have been able to better situate the knowledge produced about participation this endeavor. Although I managed to have open conversations about these relations to a substantial degree, I did fail to develop these relations to their full potential; discerning how to engage in these conversations on the ground can be very challenging.

3.3 MY OWN POSITIONALITY

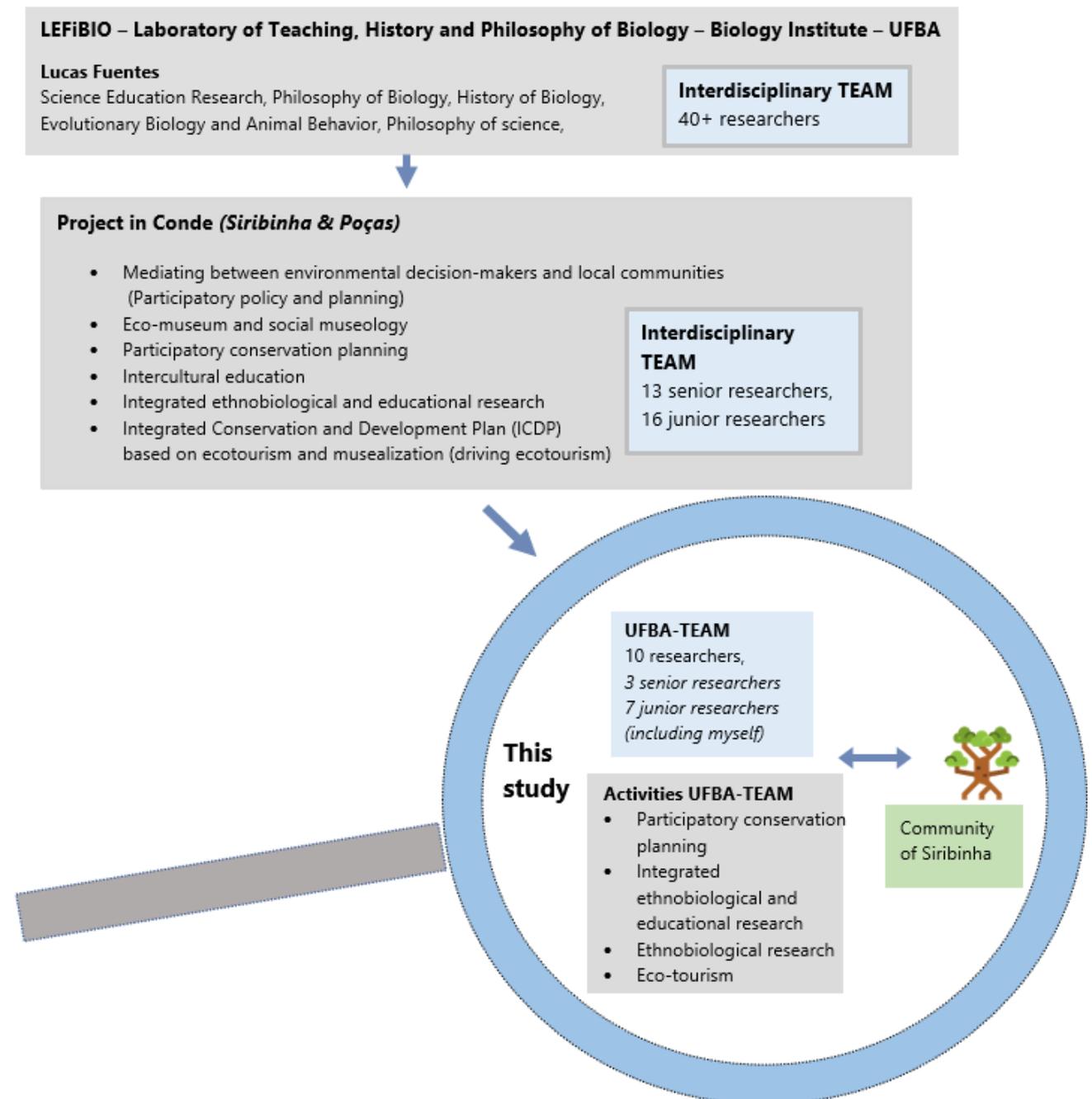
The exploration of my own social and political location in this study has many phases that will come back with this research's story. Yet as a starter, I want to place my more general social political location here as I understood it from the beginning. Even if I have Latin roots and my ancestors might have spoken from marginal spaces in their times, I grew up in the socio-economical privileged context of any other middle-class Dutch citizen. This made it possible for me, as a white female, to study at a northern European university and choosing a study I like. It is from this space, and understood through this socio-political identity and how it situates my experiences of sense-making, affective relations, subjectivities, and personal narratives that I base my work on.

The activities I engaged with as a master's student are thus situated within dynamic historical and cultural contexts (Glass, 2001). Therefore, my experience is colored by the context of a female master student from a western well-funded university, with privileges in terms of economic and political influence and autonomy. For example, in contrast to the place my academic career is positioned in, Brazil's socio-economic and political context allows for less security, in physical, economic, and political ways. Not only in the possibility of academic careers but also in overall day-to-day life. Let's face it. For some (not all) students at the UFBA, being a student is more of a brutally important phase in the struggle for safeguarding their livelihoods, than it is 'having fun' at the academy. Prospects of living from anything related to the academy are minimal, and these are currently becoming worse and worse. In the following chapters, I hope to tell a story in which, among other things, relational privileges are foregrounded, and one in which I acknowledge my own location, lived experiences, and situated knowledge on the base of thinking and researching relationality (Gerlach, 2018). Despite these differences, and precisely because of these differences, I ground this endeavor in this complex set of positions, that are dynamic and can partly transform overtime.

3.4 SITUATING THIS RESEARCH

In relation to the UFBA, I explored how they themselves engaged in research in Siribinha. Their research consists of many smaller sub research projects that are all led by Lucas Fuentes, wherein the overall aim is to do more participatory research that is empowering for the community of Siribinha itself on the one hand and focuses on reevaluation of traditional knowledge systems (in knowledge integration processes) while driving conservation efforts in the Itapicuru estuary, on the other. This included participatory meetings that were organized by one of the team members of the UFBA, the training of community-member as eco-guides, the research around the establishment of an eco-

museum, the integration and dialogue of local knowledge in the local primary school, the research on the local ethnotaxonomies in place, and research for the conservation of the estuary.



Graph 3.1 Situating this research (from September 2019- May 2021)⁴

I fulfilled various roles as a researcher during this complex research, that ended up having elements of an insider, outsider and outsider-within. The outsider-within role I had was that of a visiting researcher at the History, Philosophy, and Biology Teaching Laboratory at the UFBA led by Lucas. As Lucas and my own supervisor David collaborate, I was somehow merged into the project as a form of academic

⁴ The amount of researchers In the Project of Conde changed over time, this capture is from September 2019

exchange between researchers of the UFBA team and Wageningen University vis versa. In conversation with Lucas, we jointly set out how my work could contribute to the project in Siribinha and there was consent from him for me to research the process of research. For the other members of the UFBA team, however, my research topic came as an established statement more than a joint decision.

My role had more insider features in terms of relationships, collaboration and the openness of data and results. I supported and aided some of the UFBA team members with their research, helped organizing meetings and actions, and even initiated new side projects. In these processes we collectively gathered and shared data, we reflected upon our data and our actions, and talked about how we could do more meaningful research for the community. While I was having these researching and activities fixed roles, I also developed friendship with some of the UFBA team members; we would go out and share the same group of friends in Salvador. I did not only come to know them, but they got to know me too, creating our own spaces where we were all insiders. The personal relations and affect that developed along the months of my stay (and is still present) also turned my interaction more insider-like.

From inside the community of Siribinha, I would sometimes take a step back and pick a birds-eye view to take a different look at the UFBA team. Mostly through my interactions with the community of Siribinha, and during these moments I became more of an outsider to study the UFBA team's behavior, attitudes and ideas (as well as my own), doing research 'on' or 'for' and not 'with' them (Baum et al., 2006). Simultaneously I investigated their research from the standpoint, experience, stories and anecdotes of the community of Siribinha. Although a lot of data and information was gathered with the UFBA team in more and less conscious ways, some of the data like my observations of the UFBA team's interactions with community members, and the stories and attitudes of the community of Siribinha, were solely collected by me.

Thus, from the beginning, this endeavor comprised the difficulty of studying a research groups' participatory potential by partly becoming part of the research group and engaging in their research activities myself while taking a more distant role from the UFBA team and getting closer to the community of Siribinha. The latter enabled me to have critical distance and therefore bring in perspectives that may not have been visible from the perspective of the internal UFBA team. As Long et al., (2016) advises, I flexibly weaved in between the scale of insider and outsider. I took the reciprocal role of an interlocuter, being close to UFBA delivering academic contributions and feedback, while attempting to not merely reproduce the ways of going about research of the UFBA team.

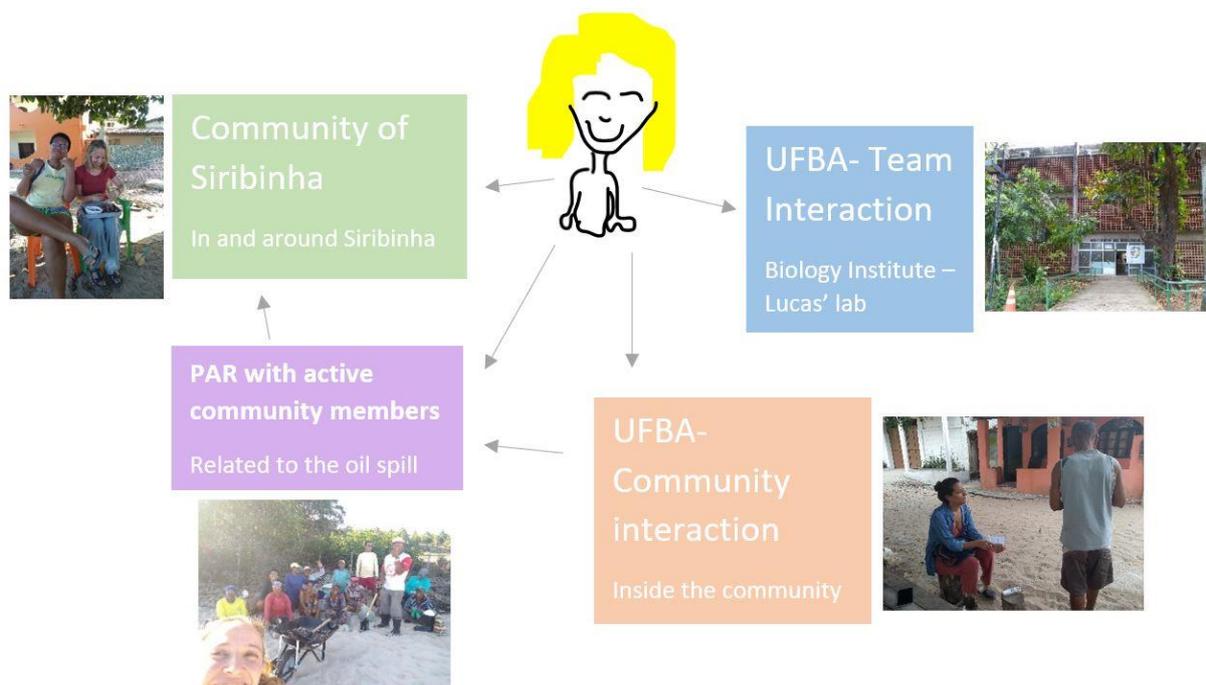
My engagement with the community in Siribinha was, and is, very different by default being dividable in two connected but different directions. One was relational but still more ethnographic work in which the community helped me to understand what the UFBA project meant for them, and second, later on, a PAR process developed concerning the oil spill disaster. Inevitably at first glance, I was just another UFBA researcher for the community, something I was sensitive to. Still, I had already an idea about the direction of my research before my first arrival to Siribinha and although I did not make that final up until my arrival, I do claim to have co-constructed the research with the community. My role entails researching how participatory work was done, and therefore I was sensitive to the interests of the community in this issue but they did not come up with this topic themselves. This somewhat intrusive outsider role is one of the many pitfalls of my own approach. Still, together we went through various phases of reflection on the work of the UFBA team (and sometimes acted upon it to change it).

Within this first role, I did let my research be further guided and influenced by my engagement and relations with the community while I was living there. I immersed myself in the community as far as those months allowed me to, joining their daily activities. In these interactions, many stories were shared by different community members and myself. In a surprisingly short time, relationships and friendships were established that are still very dear to me. The stories we exchange serve as the medium through which knowledge was shared and relationships sustained. Within these relationships, and in a more general way, I shared my findings, and reflected on them together with the community members I was engaging with. In my conversations with them, while engaging in the rituals they do every day, we jointly reflected on my work: researching the researchers in their research that aims to become more participatory, what initial results showed, and how things might be done differently in the future.

Later the second role crystalized. A PAR-like process connected to the oil spill disaster developed that devastated the northern Brazilian beaches and estuaries from September 2019 onwards. Together with the active community members, I enacted the role of a community- and social worker, supporting oil cleaning, crowdfunding a campaign for emergency packages and safety equipment for cleaning. In this act, together raising the voices of and interests of the community of Siribinha that easily become marginalized in these kinds of disaster context. However, this raised a lot of thorny ethical dilemmas that I will discuss later. Thus, as mentioned before, I state that although it did not start as a PAR process, my interaction with the community slowly evolved into one. Through a dialectical process of acting and reflecting with the community, my work gravitated towards PAR. Although this was not the initial purpose of my research, these actions presented spaces for developing close relationships of affection, care and reciprocity that have very much informed the results of this study and its potential for positive change. This second role and the connected relationships have therefore informed my first role as well.

Consequently, the audiences to whom I am accountable are multiple; the UFBA team, the leading professor of the UFBA team (Lucas), the different community members that are more active participants in the UFBA project and those community members that are less so, and of course, my own supervisors and the University I work from. Trying to mediate the responsibility I felt for attaining to the interests of both the community and the UFBA team, I sharpened my research questions on the way. Positioned within this tension early on, I started to grasp the somewhat unequal influence they had on my formulation of the research (Hall & Tandon, 2017).

Hence, I situate myself and this investigation within this specific methodological complexity (of doing a inception-ish kind of study) where I research the researchers doing their research and my own complicity in it, which comes with multiple challenges consequently driving stiff learning curves for myself as well as the people I engaged with. It is this complex entanglement, and its challenges, that makes the study particularly interesting.



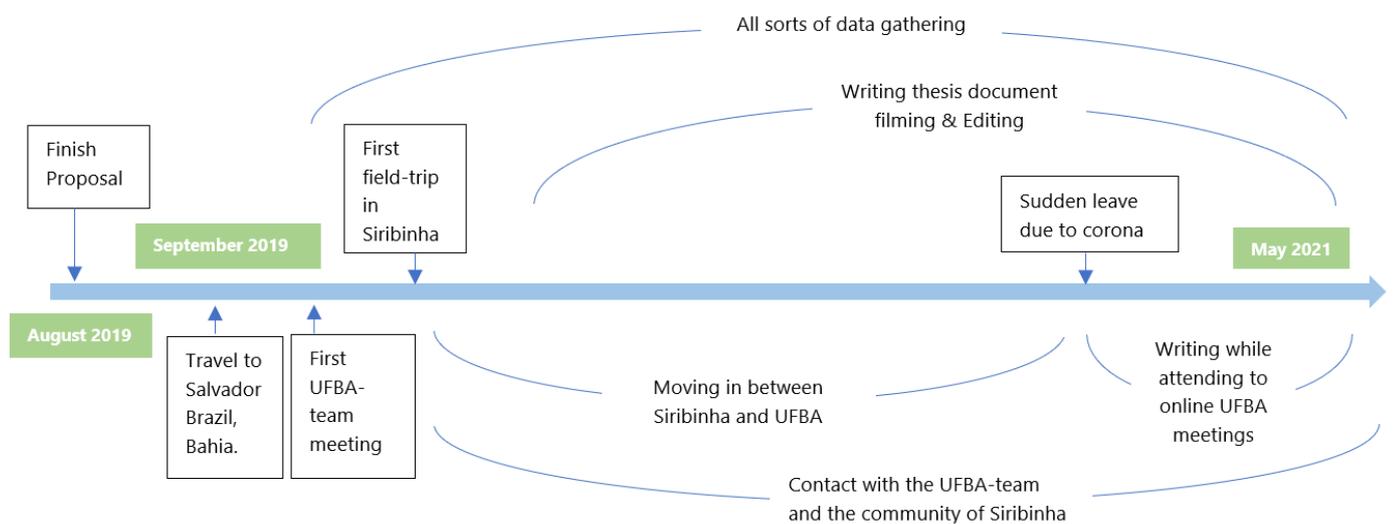
Graph 3.2 Spaces of research

3.5 SPAN AND REACH

Even if my stay in Brazil was ‘only’ seven months, this study took place and got iteratively reconsidered for 1,5 years. For seven months it took place in Brazil within the spaces where the UFBA team and community members of Siribinha engaged with each other, the spaces of interaction of the community itself, and in the spaces of interaction between the UFBA team members. Geographically speaking, within those seven months I moved back and forward between the city of Salvador (and more specifically, the UFBA where most of the researchers were located and worked) and Siribinha. The aim was to stay a year, but due to Covid-19 I had to move back to the Netherlands. Although the span of my research is different from deep ethnographic work that is often situated for a more extended time in the same place, I have been naturally keeping the formal and personal relationships we built ever since we met 1,5 years ago. To some degree I am still part of the UFBA-team, as I join meetings, talk about my research once in a while, am in contact with Lucas, and still consider some of the team members my close friends. This long-during engagement differs from most master thesis (at the WUR) engaging in three or four months of field work.

Thus, while trying to avoid engaging in ‘drive-through “fieldwork” as mentioned by Amitty Doolittle (in Bryant, 2015, p. 516), as explained before, I engaged with both groups for a longer period, cohabited with both groups, and engaged with them in formal as well as informal setting. Smith et al., (2020) argues that although immersion is key to PAR or any participatory research, taking inclusion seriously is not enough, it is about creating durable relationships. I feel lucky to have gained many new friends in this adventure. It brings me great joy to WhatsApp video call with some of the community members in Siribinha about every other week, as well as spending time with some of the researchers that became close friends and are currently more close to me in geographic terms. Consequently, even if I take the interviews and observed data in Brazil as the leading groundwork, the current dynamics and

relationship I have with the UFBA team and my friends in Siribinha are also still informing my latest writings.



Graph 3.3 Research timeline

My 'sample' has been both the UFBA team at the community of Siribinha. In Siribinha my sample includes people of all ages, ethnicities, occupations, (power) statuses, and genders (Méndez et al., 2017). This includes seafood gatherers, fishers, hotel or pousada owners, restaurant owners, local politicians, kids, teachers. In total I interviewed 40 people of Siribinha in one-to-one conversations, or sometimes together with one other family member. The interviews took a minimum of 45 minutes and mostly about 1,5 hours. I had a 100% response rate since everyone I talked with was OK with me having a chat with them, joining them in whatever they were doing, or even interviewing them. I always asked if I could record the interviews before recording. If they agreed, I made sure they repeated to authorize me to record. Due to the sudden outbreak of Covid-19 I could not have a one-on-one conversation with one of the teachers, and someone at the municipality that got involved and sometimes supported the communitarian work.. I engaged in a more superficial way with about 65 members of the community. Although my closest affective relationship developed with those members that have been taken actively part in communitarian work and participative research with the UFBA, I did also observe, interact, listened and spoke to those community members that never showed their face in any UFBA related meeting.

On the side of the UFBA I focused on the researchers involved in the project of Conde⁵, especially those working in Siribinha while I was there and others working on this project. Many of them were master or Ph.D. students, and some were post-docs or professors. Even though I did interviews with more than thirteen researchers, I focused on ten of them including myself being: Lucas, Fernanda, Pedro, Thais, Ana, Mariana, Felipe, Camila, Gustavo. All were either supervised by, or collaborated closely with, professor Lucas Fuentes. Interviews were somewhat more structured and yet informal. I had specific themes ready that I was curious about, and I put these stories next to what I was observing in action. Lucas, as head of the researchers' group, I interviewed three times in total with

⁵ Also referred to as the Ethno-Siribinha project or Ethno-Siribinha group

each some time in between to also see if opinions and ways of analyzing and seeing had changed over time. These interviews either from the community or the UFBA team are however just a snapshot of a particular moment. I have gathered at almost as many insights from the meetings I participated in (up until now), the conversations I have with friends from the UFBA, and my observations more in general.

3.6 METHODS

I conducted **open and semi-structured interviews** with UFBA team members as well as community members. At the UFBA I used semi-structured interview formats with pre-thought themes to touch upon the same topics. My questions were themed around the following issues: conceptions of participation and conservation, their relationship with people from Siribinha, reflection on their work in Siribinha, personal motivations and interests for engaging in this project, attitude towards, and relationship with other UFBA team members and ingroup dynamics, relationship with the head professor Lucas. In Siribinha, I engaged in more open-ended interviews with only some pre-thought themes but a looser character. Often these open-ended interviews functioned as good first excuse to start and develop a relationship with those that I had not seen or got to know yet. My questions were themed around the topics of: relationship with and attitude towards UFBA, reflection on their work, their motivations for participating or not, and their needs and interests.

I used **'hanging around'** as a way to first speak with those sitting in front of their houses, or those already engaged with the research project. Others I spoke to by hanging around during the weekly football matches in which I also participated with great joy. Some who often drunk beer outside of the local hut looking bar, I joined for a beer, or just came and sat with them and joined them in their conversations. I also joined fishing activities, leisure activities as going to the mangroves hidden beaches (what a punishment), the very idyllic daily aratu-cracking (crab-cracking), and many more day-to-day activities. I prioritized joining these activities because they seem to break up the routine of community members least.



Photo 3.1 Sharing recipes, left Arabic acaraje (falafel) and Spanish Tortilla, right Muqueca de surumi (vongole stew)

Following Smith et al., (2010) and Lykes (1997) I did an attempt to not engage with the Siribinha community members nor the UFBA team members as merely a researcher extrapolating data, but also interacted with both as the person I am. This meant, not only asking for their stories as community members of Siribinha, but simultaneously exhibited my sometimes slightly explosive personality, my

enthusiasm in telling stories, the way I engage in affective relationships, my insecurities, my sense of humor, the love I have for cheese, and all the possible privileges that debouch into my current social and political location. This '**storying**' (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017) I engaged with was based on my day-to-day contact with community members and the UFBA team with whom I both constructed a profound relationship over the months still consider some to be good friends. 'Storying', San Pedro & Kinloch (2017) argue, happens in the space where you tell and listen and where you give and receive stories. As San Pedro & Kinloch (2017) state, as researchers, we can effect change by the engagements that arise during the get-together of telling and the receiving stories. In these spaces we develop relationships while we listen and story (Susana Caxaj, 2015). "To do this, we listen not to extract; rather, we listen to build, develop, and share our own stories with those who have shared their stories with us" (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). This is a clear point of conjunction between theory and practice, and between theory and methods. Using this method enables me to open up to the community, which allows them to open up to me as well. We shared stories that we could relate to, making the distance and difference smaller, such as the personal issues related to romantic love, family, insecurity and depression. We equally shared stories that made our differences obvious such as stories about education, our experiences in the rest of the world, connection with nature, different food traditions, ability to fish, and so on. "Stories are often told using complex and circular structures to purposefully illustrate connections between experiences" (Stanton, 2014). However, in this method also lies the risk of not advancing on methodological decolonizing practices because stories are framed within my own Eurocentric ideas of stories (Susana Caxaj, 2015). As a cultural outsider, I was, and continue to be, concerned about my influence on the reshaping of story, especially when seeking to promote decolonization in research. Therefore, I decided to use an iterative and dialogical approach that would allow the community and the UFBA team researchers to expand and clarify their stories through subsequent unstructured and informal conversations, interviews or interactions. In this way, again, letting both groups speak for themselves as much as possible.



Photo 3.2 My surprise goodbye party

Participatory observation and participatory action was done on a large spectrum including interactions between the community and the UFBA-team, within the UFBA, and within the community.

I assisted in the interaction between both groups, helped during participatory processes that the UFBA team organized, observed or participated in the interviews they conducted, followed researcher when they interacted with the community, and initiated a side project concerning an oil spill disaster. The latter is an issue that has brought a lot of ethical dilemmas and was one of the main aspects that made my self-reflection process fall into dark loopholes that I will clarify later. At the same time, my observations within the UFBA were also diverse, for instance, I hung around in the lab, grabbed food together, took (and am still taking part) in their (virtual) meetings and discussions, co-organized a congress of the lab at the UFBA, went along during formal and informal team meetings. With the community, I observed and took part in the many activities I also described before, such as, cracking aratu, drinking beer, hanging around, dancing, celebrating festivities, and joking around, as is ordinary in Siribinha. In a logbook I noted down all my findings concerning these observations and actions including my self-reflection.



Photo 3.3 Possible horizons for collaboration, LEFiBIO Congress

Video and participatory video filming was used as a communication tool during the participatory activities that I conducted with community members to capture the ambiance and relationships, as a tool for my reflection, and to communicate part of the work I have done. I shot some videos, others were shot by community members themselves, and some came from the UFBA team. I used the editing process of a short documentary film as another circle of reflection. As Walker & Boyer (2018) argue, video can be powerful, not only as an analysis tool, but also to share research findings with a broad audience, especially when combining the traditions of ethnography, documentary filmmaking, and storytelling in an engaging way (Walker & Boyer, 2018). Therefore, the short documentary film during the final presentation will be a means for disseminating results and thus visualizing and 'getting a feeling for' the story told.

Additionally, I organized three **unstructured open focus groups** that took place with community members of Siribinha and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes each. One was with four and another one with five women while cracking aratu (crab). Both times we spoke about what they thought of the research projects of the UFBA, and if it had affected the community, and if so, in what way. The last focus group was with five men that were drinking a beer while resting after fishing of the day. The

same topics were discussed as the other focus groups, yet this focus group spoke more specifically about the responsibility of the UFBA team, the use of local knowledge and the possible 'return' or benefit for the community.

Last, I have analyzed **WhatsApp communication** with the community, between community and researchers, and between researchers (for example, the famous and infamous WhatsApp group ethno-Siribinha). This communication form brings a natural logbook, of the exact dates in which actions occurred or meanings were shared, and it portrayed part of the ingroup dynamics.

3.7 DATA

As explained by the methods described above, I gathered stories, built relationships, and lived with both the UFBA team as the community in Siribinha and used different data collection methods in this process. Therefore, the type of data I gathered varies. I have notes of observations, a logbook that I used as a diary for self-reflexive thoughts and main observations of the day, focus groups audios (and sometimes information of other informal conversations), WhatsApp communication (privately as well as in the group of the Lab that works in Siribinha called 'entho-Siribinha'), videos of my actions and those of the community during the communitarian work, and audios of all my semi-structured and open-ended interviews. Altogether, I gathered about 60 hours of plain interviews and focus groups, four to five hours of spoken notes, observations and self-reflection by myself, about 18 hours of video material to be used for the documentary (including UFBA-member presentations), I have about 30 to 40 pages of raw notes and observations, a small logbook with about 60 pages, and I filtered from 2500+ WhatsApp messages those that were relevant for me (200+).



Photo 3.4 Part of the UFBA team on the way to Siribinha

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Due to the amount of data, interviews and focus groups were not fully transcribed but summarized. In this process of summarization, I listened to the audio two times repeatedly. I made a selection of the

most relevant information, keeping some of my pre-established theoretical concepts in mind, but also letting go of those conceptions that seemed less relevant to the information given. At the same time, I gathered and accounted for the information and statements that came back more than once. For example, when I listen to the audio of one community member stating “I have no idea what they do this for, and what happened with the information I give them” and afterwards I would listen to an audio of a UFBA-researcher stating “I explained what my research was about shortly ..” or another UFBA-researcher stating “ I think the community has no idea what happens with the data” , I would make an note while summarizing the audio. Afterwards, I would gather the information from these different actors and group them together. Since the interviews differ in timespan, the length of the summaries also vary. Proportionally, I wrote about two pages lengthy summaries for interviews of an hour. I listened to all the audios at least three times and made sure to summarize the features that to me seemed most relevant and transcribed only those emblematic quotes that well reflected and summarized that person's story, attitudes, and reflections. By listening to the audios repeatedly and writing the summary, I got familiarized with the broader themes I already had in mind. I organized these common themes – topics, ideas and patterns that came up repeatedly such as:

- First contact with the community
- Workshops & meetings
- Relationships, trust and empathy
- Personality
- Benefits for the community
- Ideas about the goals of the project
- Informing the community
- Perception of UFBA by community
- Dealing with difference
- Internal disputes UFBA
- Internal disputes within the community of Siribinha
- Distrust
- Autonomy
- Funding
- Ambitions of UFBA team
- Dreams and stories of Siribinha's people

Some of these themes showed results from both the UFBA team as well as the community. Therefore, I took them together, putting for example the UFBA's explanation of goals of the project and the communities' explanation of the same together under the theme 'Ideas about the goals of the project'. In some instances, the topic of 'distrust' I engaged separately with related to UFBA dynamics and the community's distrust towards the UFBA team because too much data existed about each and they had less relation to each other. Overall, I started to organize and structure my data according to these themes, and added the notes of my logbook, and other observations and reflections. I used inductive as well as deductive types of analysis. From listening to the data I extracted the themes, while I had some themes already envisioned due to the more in-depth familiarization with PAR, feminist and decolonial methodologies. This iterative process, mingling between inductive and deductive thinking, made me revise my theoretical concepts while looking at the data and experiencing PAR's actions and reflecting upon them. In these processes, I threw overboard many theoretical concepts that I saw in practice were not relevant for this work. This process of iteration of moving between inductive and deductive coding is the central tenet of my analysis.

4. PAINTING THE CONTOURS OF THE LANDSCAPE

"The land knows you, even when you are lost."

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*

The stories outlined in this the forthcoming two chapters will attempt to paint one landscape. The landscape of participatory research in Siribinha. One that can answer *how* and *why* research is done in a particular way, and a landscape that can expose what effect that particular way can have on participation. By zooming into that landscape, on a micro-level, the following three key spaces of interaction surface that most significantly shape how research goes about in Siribinha and what implications this 'going about' has on the participatory potential: 1. the internal dynamics of the UFBA team; 2. the internal dynamics of the community of Siribinha; 3. the interaction between the UFBA team and the community of Siribinha. Last, but maybe most importantly, on a more macro scale (and while zooming out) these experiences shed light on the structural influence of academia⁶ and the implications academic culture and institutions have on the empirical work of research, and more specifically, participatory research. Thus, zooming out from these three spaces of interaction and one macrostructure, I attempt to paint a comprehensive landscape that illustrates the complexities and the different fields and factors of influence in participatory research in Siribinha. By doing so, I hope to bring insights into how to calibrate theoretical aims for decolonial forms of research with its messy reality.

With this purpose, the next bundle of stories, anecdotes, observations and reflections will guide you through the path of experiences I went through for answering the most descriptive question: *What practices, strategies, interests, and motivations shape the research project in Siribinha?* I will attempt to tell a holistic story, bringing insights into how research is done in a University-community setting in Siribinha. Following my personal timeline and storyline from the moment of my first arrival in Salvador, Bahia, I will start by describing the context of the UFBA and the community.

4.1 UFBA Context

Some remarkable aspects about the UFBA team's organization and interaction became apparent to me quite soon after I arrived in the sunny city of Salvador. After having dwelled at the spacious UFBA campus, that looked somewhat like a small Berlin-ish enclave eaten by the jungle, I finally found the square-looking Biology Institute. "laboratory Lucas Fuentes" it said on the paper note I had wrapped up in my pocket. I entered looking for a door with the same name on it. I lost my patience after three unknown namesplates and directed myself to an improvised coffee bar in the corner of the hallway. In my best Portuguese I asked a sweet elderly looking lady "Hi, me need find professor room, don't know where. Help?" she looked a bit staggered (I guess it was from my broken accent and sentence) "what is his name?" she asked. "Lucas- Fuentes" I answered doubtful if she would know any professors' working space by memory. She first let go of an "oooohhh Lucas" making it sound as if it was obvious where he would be, and then she closed one eye suspiciously and asked "You mean his laboratory? Are you on his team?". I felt uncomfortable but could not think of anything better to say than 'yes'. A young

⁶ With 'the Academy' or 'Academia' I refer to how academia works, the power that resides in such institutions and the present academic culture.

student of probably my age passed by and repeated "Lucas? You need to know where his lab is? Follow the steps to the second floor and then turn left". Flabbergasted by the fact that he apparently was well known in the Institute I followed the recommendations.

Before I attended the first official UFBA team meeting, I had already met with Fernanda and Pedro, who were part of the UFBA research team. I had invited both of them for my birthday and arrival party at my new house, where I moved in with a friend of theirs. I had also already met Lucas shortly, during my first UFBA visit, when he made clear that I should feel welcome in the team. Knowing I was going to attend their first meeting, I was excited and filled with curiosity. The laboratory⁷ looked as it did the last time, gray and strongly trip-lighted with some tables in the middle and small study cabins from which one was Lucas's office. I thought it was very sympathetic he had his own desk in the same larger room as everyone else. "we are waiting for how many people more Ana?" Lucas asked " Only Vivi so far". Ana responded. She had briefly smiled at me when I introduced myself to her but afterwards she did not seem particularly interested in knowing why I came to the lab, Camilla neither. They both did however try to bring some humor and chillness in the room during that sometimes awkward waiting moments in which everybody is sitting round a table waiting for someone to arrive to start the meeting. No one was particularly responsive, except for Lucas, who was happy to bump and join in on any sarcastic comment or joke, when he was not making one himself.

4.1.1 THE UFBA TEAM AND THEIR PROJECTS

In the first week I was there Lucas gave a glimpse on how the project had started and explained the different research projects that are taking place. The first contact of the UFBA in Siribinha was initiated by professor Lucas and Jose. Through mediation of an active NGO at the time in Siribinha called Siribeira, they got introduced to Annabella, who was one of the school professors of the primary school of Siribinha. They started to work in the schools and with the students, bringing an integration of ethno-biological knowledge of the community and academic science in the classroom. Under the leadership of Lucas, the project gradually started to take shape. It began with knowledge integration in the school of Siribinha and turned into an extensive inter-and trans-disciplinary project with collaboration from different universities, researchers from various countries, and academics from several disciplines, such as ethno-biology, (science) education, philosophy, environmental conservation, political science and more.

Most of the team members of this UFBA project first got to know Siribinha through an interactive academic course with field trips to Siribinha, called the ACCS -Ação Curricular em Comunidade e em Sociedade (Curricular Action in Community and Society). This course given by Lucas creates an organic first moment of contact between the young researchers and the community of Siribinha. "I think this course is important because it gives the opportunity for students to have their first experience with a real community, and to practice their researchers' skills", he told me months later during our conversations.

In the first meeting I joined, Lucas elaborated on all the different subprojects and researchers in the project as a whole. Fernanda works on collective action with the community in the field of environmental protection and conservation. For her thesis, she organizes participatory meetings and workshops together with Mariana, a professor in political sciences. Through participatory meetings they bring community members together to jointly decide what the problems were that most tormented the community, and how they could possibly act to change it. Pedro does his PhD linking local ethno-taxonomies of the fishers (women and men) of Siribinha to a model of overlapping ontologies, a concept developed by his (and my) supervisor related to integrating different knowledge

⁷ Also refer to as 'Lab'

systems. By interviews, triangulation and other methods he was able to create taxonomic model of how fishers in Siribinha ordered different fishes, crustaceans, mollusks, and birds. He had already talked with many fishers and had gathered most of his data before I arrived. Lucas added in between lines that it was important that Pedro or Fernanda would introduce me to the community members.

He went on explaining the work of Ana and Camilla (almost always named in pair). They were currently more active in Poças, the village next to Siribinha and both part of the municipality of Conde, but they had started off in Siribinha with their work. Camilla engages in the process of integrating local knowledge in schools, to create alternative education on plants combining biology and transformative educational perspective. Ana works from the fields of anthropology and biology on getting to know fishing methods, and other local traditions to integrate this kind of knowledge in the primary schools of Poças together with the teachers. Next to the participatory workshops and meetings with the teachers they both engaged in other communal action together with the community members. Ana's latest idea was presented at the second meeting, in which she explained there was a need of the community members to do something with collective food harvesting and gardening and connect that to the school. Mariana worked together with Fernanda in the participatory meeting but was also supervising and guiding Fernanda in her work as she had years of experience in organizing participatory meetings in a community setting in another region of Bahia. She is a professor in political science at the UFBA and joined the group to support and supervise Fernanda.

In this first meeting, Lucas made clear to the rest that I was supposed to interview most of those involved in the Siribinha project, to analyze the impact of the project as a whole, and that I was to take part in the field trips and activities of the UFBA team. Not long after, I presented my first ideas on researching the participatory processes in Siribinha and that for this cause, I was going to take the project as a whole under the magnifying glass. From the reaction in their faces, I felt some were a bit creeped by this idea, and others did not really understand my *Portunhol* (Brazilianated Spanish), and others seemed to be excited. It was an uncomfortable presentation, in which I explained that I would have a double role. One as insider, joining the UFBA team as a visiting researcher, one as outsider, coming from a European university and being white, blond, and middle-class (Smith et al., 2010), and maybe one as outsider-within, being sensitive for the tensions between the two.

As the weeks passed, the flow chart that Lucas presented in his PowerPoint, that represented the construction and organization of the whole project in the Municipality of Conde (Including Poças and Siribinha) became more complex every week. Many other professors, master and PhD students were involved and people -like myself- kept being added to the project. "We needed someone who would know about museology to help us with establishing the Eco-museum" Lucas said, two weeks before he introduced Leonor that would help on co-developing the eco-museum. I also started to get a grip on the natural proceedings of the UFBA team and how they communicate and organize their research, and the role that Lucas would have in it. Early on I understood that these specific ways of organizing research could have an effect on the way the UFBA team engaged in participatory practices overall.

Although very informal conversations took place with Lucas and his students, the way he led the research group seemed somewhat hierarchical in their execution, in the sense that he would be the central point of organization, decision-making, and feedback for everyone. I witnessed he would often talk for almost two hours straight. Every meeting he summarized everything that was done by all of the different people of the team. Like a mantra, he talked quite a lot about dialogue with the community, being aware of how conventional science would not appreciate local knowledge, and also how to create positive impact for the community. The way Lucas kept highlighting these issues gave me the impression, it was not just for newcomers like me; he seemed afraid others would forget or not fully grasp the project.

Officially, there was space for others to talk (and I would, even in my broken Portuguese). Yet, even if there he encouraged his students to ask questions, I got the feeling these meetings were not so participatory, interactive or dynamic in themselves. He showed to be very open for comments, and even to be open for people to cut him off and make comments. But somehow, not many people seemed to do that, or felt comfortable doing that. Besides, most people including myself were rather drained after two and sometimes even three hours of listening, and therefore there was not much time for comments or questions. Ironically, this seemed like a standard ritual because as easy as he opened himself to questions, as relaxed and apparent he would also close the meeting even if nobody had made any comment. "No comments? OK so next meeting is when?"

4.1.2 LUCAS, THE LEADING PROFESSOR

Since Lucas shaped great part of the way the UFBA team interacted with each other and with the community of Siribinha, it is worthwhile describing him a bit more in detail. As Pedro once said "He seems like an academic superman" with visible academic superpowers, and rumors go about that he only sleeps for three hours a night (to me that is cheating). Within and outside of the Laboratory of Teaching, Philosophy and History of Biology he supervises numerous master and PhD students, collaborates with numerous other researchers (as with David, my own supervisor), is head of the National Institute of Science and Technology in Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Studies in Ecology and Evolution (INCT INC-TREE), publisher of countless articles, and a passionate blog writer for Darwinianas a blog interacting and popularizing science in various areas. Lately, he even got into podcast making. Besides, he is able to answer every private WhatsApp message within two minutes while at the same time making sure the researchers WhatsApp group on 'etno-Siribinha' will not pass more than a couple of hours without news articles, political statements, or topics for discussion (and I am sure I am still falling short). Overall, Lucas gave me the impression of an enthusiastic, albeit very efficient and pragmatic person. Indeed, only pragmatism and efficiency can enable a person to keep so many balls in the air.

Not unimaginably, everybody in the lab seems to very much look up to him. Not only is he a kind of superstar within his lab and the Institute of Biology, he is also well known in the whole UFBA. He himself seemed oblivious to this fact. He didn't seem to care too much or even be flattered by this reality. His intrinsic enthusiasm for the work and the topics related to his field of Education and Philosophy and History of Biology is the only thing that clearly stood out. Almost every day, he seemed to get hyped about yet another theoretical concept or framework that could be 'very important and useful for our team'. His passion for, and slightly workaholic attitude towards, research and teaching seemed and seems very genuine and therefore also natural to him. It did not appear extraordinary for him at all. Although he, himself, would not reckon or perse strongly appreciate his status in the UFBA ambiance, clearly his students, researchers and co-researchers are aware of his status within the academic world especially within the UFBA. The admiration for his academic, and sometimes even personal and political, stances however, seemed to have influence on the dynamics within the group.

4.1.3 HOW FIELDTRIPS ARE ORGANIZED

Lucas was also guiding in setting up fieldtrips in a very particular way. One particular house in Siribinha would be always rented, the house of dona⁸ Luara. Everyone would sleep there together and go out during the day to do their own fieldwork. Later Ana told me sometimes the students of the AACCS would join the fieldtrip and then the total amount of people of the UFBA in Siribinha could rise to 14.

Since there is not much food to buy in Siribinha itself, food is bought in a big supermarket and brought to the house of dona Luara. She makes breakfast, lunch and dinner for everyone and gets

⁸ 'Dona' is Portuguese for 'lady', as 'seu' is for 'sir'. I use it in this thesis to refer to the elders of the community

paid for that service next to the rent of the apartment she received. She lives within the same space in a much smaller, and less well built house with her husband Marcus and their daughter. The team would stay for a working week, thus 5 days, and then get back to Salvador.

It had not always been exactly like that. Jose, the first researcher to do research 'in' and 'with' the community of Siribinha, had lived in the community, and moved between Salvador and Siribinha for several months. Also Camilla and Ana had told Lucas they wanted to stay for longer, and they would use their scholarship money (that was not supposed to include fieldwork costs) to stay more weeks in Poças. Lucas explained he had stayed at different houses himself but he thought this house of dona Luara was the most appropriate to take that many students in for the week. "Because of the limited funding I have for the project, especially in these times" he said, referring to the current political context in which Bolsonaro is President of the country, "this is the best and most efficient way of organizing everybody's field work".

Indeed, funding seems to be the main reason for restructuring the organization of field trips. "Why are field trips organized this way? I asked Fernanda whispering in the lab. "Well on the one hand because Lucas thinks it is good to discuss things with each other and learn from each other, but I think most importantly because there is only a limited amount of funding for this project". Pedro had told me similar reasons "I think it is because with the amount of people joining the project, and the amount of money Lucas has for the project, it is most pragmatic and efficient to hire one big house in Siribinha and all sleep there the same week". Ana tells a similar story. "The problem is that every time we have less money, but more people join the project" you know Ana told me sometime before we left to Siribinha "Lucas is very pragmatic you know, he just thinks, how can I make sure as many students as possible profit from the project's money to do their research", she said.

While thinking about the implications of these reorganizations, I could not keep myself from thinking whether this 'pragmatism' and 'efficiency'-driven organization is indeed necessary for coping with budget cuts, or whether is also not partly driven by Lucas' pragmatic personality. Either way, it occurred to me that the centralized organization of the research might be of important influence on the research, and how researchers interacted with the community.

4.1.4 METHODOLOGY WITHIN THE INSTITUTE OF BIOLOGY

Although Lucas encourages using a variety of both qualitative and quantitative research and the individual research projects show a move towards more ethnographic and anthropological methods, neither the project as a whole nor the individual researchers seem to be untouched by more quantitative and positivistic ontologies and epistemologies that reign within the Institute of Biology. Fernanda was the first to report the strong tendency of quantitative methods within the institute of Biology. "Sometimes you are in this group (referring to the UFBA team) and it seems normal to do qualitative research and construct your research together with the community, but really, it has been such a drag for me to just push qualitative methods forward within the master of Ecology". While we stood in line for the university restaurant, she continued, "I had to almost fight with my supervisors, of course not Lucas, but the other professors of Ecology to get the topic and methods of my thesis accepted. And still...I know for sure they don't truly see me as a scientist." A friend of hers that was having lunch with us nodded disappointedly "believe me Esther, within my field they do not take humanities serious at all". Months later, I had to agree with Fernanda. During mid-term presentations, she clearly was the only one approaching her research qualitatively, mentioning humans and even more a traditional community in her research. Others students did not do strictly ecological research that did not involve people or local communities. No. Qualitative methods or questions about the relevance for people were just left out. The way how certain methods and methodology in science can

reinforce the status quo of what science is and how it related to society became painfully visible during these three hours of mid-term presentations.

Pedro brought another example. He had started his PhD within Ecology, and started his project with a different supervisor which whom he had a lot of troubles to communicate and work with during his first year. He was supposed to do a quantitative study in agroforestry systems but was later redirected to do research with insects, something that he did not feel passionate about at all. "I got disillusioned with academia as a whole really and was thinking about quitting the PhD". He explained that looking for a project that worked in the area of ethno sciences was his only and last option to try and work in academia. Yet, even with him entering the project in Siribinha, his PhD in Ecology still bounded him to the quantitative methodologies and levels of supposed 'objectivity', he said.

4.2 Situating Siribinha

The following contextualization's are needed to situate the analysis of participatory practices in Siribinha as they will expose some structural factors of Siribinha's context that always play a role in shaping the participatory potential.

4.2.1 SITUATEDNESS IN THE REGION

The way Siribinha is situated, right in between the northern border of the state of Bahia and the southern part of the state of Sergipe, explains some of the political dynamics within the community. While Siribinha is part of the municipality of Conde and therefore the State of Bahia, they have a stronger connection to the capital of the nearby state of Sergipe, Aracaju. One could even state that part of the community of Siribinha actually is part of the State of Sergipe since Cajueirinho, a small place with paradise-like white sandy beaches hidden in the mangroves on the other side of the river belongs to Sergipe. Cajueirinho is where most people of Siribinha go to leisure, or to work with tourism taking tourist for mangrove trips. Many of the people living in there are family of community members of Siribinha. The fact that Siribinha is a border town and its community is somewhat divided into Cajueirinho and Siribinha creates some political and social tensions because local policies and politics are always compared to those in Cajueirinho. Luiza, one of the seafood gatherers with family in Cajueirinho, once told me "you see!?" With a sassy tttssss sound she went on "in Cajueirinho they do get more help from the state, to help the fisher communities with the oil". Luiza was holding their own state, that of Bahia, accountable for not yet having send any financial help for the people that were not able to sell or eat their fish anymore due to the massive oil spill. "They did get help and we are left with nothing! Our government is really shit, they just put things into their own pockets" Carolina almost yelled. Later that evening while exchanging some cheese favorites with Julia and her daughter Amanda, Amanda said "You know, these things always go very slow here, as if they forget us. You know how it works Esther? At the time they finally come with some kind of compensation here, the whole oil spill issue is over". I wanted to believe her, but from what I had seen by then from the oil spills this might have been a slightly too optimistic statement. Still, the idea that 'the grass is greener on the other side', does not really help the relationship of the community towards their local politicians and the municipality at large. They compare policies and the management of public space from one state to the other. All with all, these comparisons increased the distrust and skeptical attitude towards local politicians.

4.2.2 DIVERSITY AND LIVELIHOODS

There are diverse ways in which the community makes a living and the fact that livelihoods are based on differentiated forms of income creates friction in the community. Not surprisingly, depending on whether a community members income mainly depended on tourism, or for example more from

fishing, the tensions and interests for engaging with the UFBA team were different and a different position is taken towards the 'development & conservation' quandary.

Some earn their money with a 'pousadas' and some with giving boat tours to mainly provincial tourists. Other people's livelihoods in the community do, however, not depend on tourism, but are affected negatively by tourism. For example, the increasing amount of people on water scooters is a big concern for fishers that solely live from river fishing, since there is a notion that water scooter scare many fishes away. Most community members in Siribinha however, base their income on a hybrid form of predominantly fishing, aratu and other crab catching, and on the other side doing boat trips for incoming tourist, rent out a house to room for the holidays, running a 'pousada' and other work in the village such as selling bread, and having a small shop.

For example, some as dona Luara, gained income renting her house to either the university staff (that would always go there) or other tourists and sell benzine for the boats, while her husband Marcos would fish every day. Others like seu⁹ Danilo had grown up in Siribinha and changed profession and main source of income. Danilo is now running a local hotel or 'Pousada', one of the first in Siribinha. His income depends on local tourism mostly that comes to relax in the holidays and weekends. But the amount of Pousada's had grown and more people had started to rent out their houses or part of their houses, which meant competition had grown over the years. Not surprisingly for such a beautiful place, tourism had increased as well.

Yet, others worked for the municipality or were family members of people working at the municipality. This created quite a big division with others in the community since distrust and skepticism dominated in their relation towards the municipality. During one of the meetings I organized, in which the community was to decide what to do with the raised funds for the oil spill disaster, that became very visible. Before everyone had arrived Clara said "yeah but we don't trust Laura, and Marcela, their families work for the municipality", Jessy added to that "no Laura herself works for the municipality". A couple of minutes later Laura and Marcela walked in the meeting space. During the hectic and tumultuous discussions, I heard Laura say: "No, I don't want to take responsibility for it myself because I know how this goes, because it is me people are going to say I will try to make profit from it in some way."

4.2.3 GENDER ROLES AND ENGENDERED EXPECTATIONS

Another factor that is important in shaping relations within the community is the gender roles and it is relevant to keep these in mind because they play a role in the relationships between the UFBA and the community as well. Local practices, and roles in the community are very much gendered. For example, the afternoon drink that is done after fishing is not a female friendly space at first. Drinking during the day and sitting outside with an alcoholic drink (mostly beer) is primarily done by men. Some of them seemed to be sitting in shades of the palm trees for ages drinking beer until the bar would close in the late afternoon. It might have been the fact that I am an outsider to this community as a whole or (and) because I am a white and blond European woman, that I felt they did accept my company to some extent. I guess it helped that I had been playing football with some of them twice a week and it seemed they had respected me for it. Yet, I didn't see it as easy for other women of the community to do the same.

One day I grabbed an empty plastic chair like the ones the men were sitting on and I joined them without saying anything. It felt a bit awkward at first glance, I have to admit, but a soon as we started to talk about football and fish, they made me feel they actually liked having a chat. "Here take some shrimps, he caught them himself!" he said pointing at the guy sitting next to him. His name was

⁹ 'Seu' is Portuguese for 'sir', as with dona for the women, I use seu it to refer to the elder men

Ricardo; he was one of the quietest and did not join the football matches. "well actually no, he is too lazy, he let his son do it for him, hahaha!" the guy said looking at Ricardo and laughing out loud. Ricardo seemed to be used to these kinds of jokes, and couldn't resist a short laugh. At least it seemed they took each other -among themselves- with a grain of salt. I laughed along and thought to myself that a very different tactic was needed to get closer to these men than with others in the community.

The fishing part is also very gender separated. Almost no women go fish at the sea, this is labelled "a man thing". Except for 'dona Carlonina', the queen fisher, and one or two other women. Still, mostly women go into the mangroves and get aratu, something man less dare to do. Others do fish in the river, depending on the season. Also, while the women would use the afternoon to crack aratus, fishermen would hang out their fishing nets and sow the holes they see. These traditional roles and behaviors are important to understand and take along when interacting with the community, as Fernanda had discussed before. "I told Lucas about how I did not feel like being taken serious by men, but I don't think he initially took it so serious. Now that more things happened with other women researchers, he does". These clear gender roles do not only shape the way the community is organized but defines in which spaces female or male researchers can enter and in which not. It facilitates certain relationships, while it makes other relationships more difficult. Even if, I had developed a relatively good relationship with quite some of the men in Siribinha, I felt my relation could never get as close as, the almost famous, researchers Jose had been with the fishers.

4.2.4 CHURCH

Another aspect that divides the community is the split between those that are part of the Catholic church, those that are part of the protestant church, or those that are attached to no church in particular. The power that the catholic church has is quite substantial in the village especially because this church, in contrast to the protestant one, is placed within the village. For the protestant church, community members have to take a boat and navigate twenty minutes upstream to reach it. Others do not go to church very often, this does not mean they do not believe or are atheists perse. All these differences in religion, and more importantly in systems of values related to these religions, dissect the community. For example, most belonging to the catholic church agreed with Barbara that "drinking is bad for you, and often people do bad things when they drink...I don't like parties where alcohol is involved". She pulled a face as if she saw someone else's backdoor excrement. "I don't want to have anything to do with those people, look how the destroy their own lives. I don't think that is a meaningful way of living" Carlos added to what his wife had said.

4.2.5 MUNICIPALITY – COMMUNITY RELATIONS

There seems to be however some more consensus and feeling of collectivity with regard to the distrust and the bitterness towards municipality of Conde, and the local politicians. The oil spills were not only a catalyst in showing this dynamic, but also a clear aggravator for the conflictual and distrustful relationship between many community members and the local politicians of the municipality. The criticism towards the local authorities, with exception of those that had family members working there, is an aspect that brings some of the community members together that differ strongly in many of the other factors mentioned above.

As a result of these internal dynamics described above the spaces of interaction of the UFBA team and the community are already messy, risky, sensitive and therefore need to be dealt with great caution. No matter in what location the UFBA team positions itself in relation to these internal differences, conflicts and other dynamics, it brings certain conflict to the forefront. The research interventions from the UFBA team with the community can function as a form of mediation between the local population and the local governance actors as well as it can unintentionally aggravate these relationships.

4.2.6 CONSERVATION AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Visions on conservation differed a lot within the community, sometimes leading to conflict and tensions between those working on collective action for conservation of the mangroves and those that did not. Chico, the younger brother of the governor's representative explained "Not everybody thinks it is important to not pollute the environment and keep it clean, indeed. If everyone from the community would help to clean the estuary, I think in two hours it would be done" he said while we drove in his car from Conde to Siribinha. He had come to pick me up and help me transport the Personal Protection Units from Conde to Siribinha for the oil cleaning team. "What do you mean?" I said naively "Well, I think if someone would say, 'if you guys go and help you will get something' then everybody would join. Yet those people doing it now they are not in it for anything. I think that with the work that the university is doing here, most of the community should participate, and support the projects." When I asked why it is important what the university does he said "It is important for future generations, environmental protection".

"I am demotivated because when there are people trying to clean the beaches and mangroves from waste, others come and like to throw that same garbage in their face" Julia said. She complained as well about the fisherwomen that would throw the broken aratu shells on the beach or in the mud next to the mangroves. "it starts to stink, but they don't care". They made clear it was not the tourists that were throwing waste everywhere "It is our own people doing that". This was somehow connected by some community members to drinking. "you see those people drinking all day? With their lazy moron asses, they sit and drink, and we work" Laura said. She was always the one making strong comments and was rarely not outspoken. "and then these boneheads dare to talk badly about us, that do all the work for them, and clean the beaches so that they can catch fish and drink more beer hhhmmmmmm". That last sound "hhmmmm" ended with her pursed lips, and an indignant and yet sassy voice. It is important to note, however, that neither of these factors are all-determining. Some of these factors that brought fragmentation to the community, intersected with each other.

4.3 Approaches for engagement in the field

In the months that followed my initial first weeks, I got more acquainted with the different motivations and ambitions of researchers, something I will shortly exemplify here. In addition, since the relationships between the UFBA team and the community strongly shape how collaboration unfolds in these kinds of university-community settings, I will illustrate what my first glimpse was on how the UFBA team related to the community, describing my first impressions of the approaches and practices they used. This was also my first eye-to-eye with the community of Siribinha.

It became clear that very different strategies and methods are being used to interact with the community. Not all methods or strategies are discussed thoroughly with the rest of the team. Each researcher has their very own specific way in which they interact with the community which differs with each researcher's personality, research aim, and methodologies and methods. Although this is obvious to some extent, as every researcher comes from different social political locations and backgrounds and therefore holds different views on research, it seems the kind and strength of the relationship that one seeks with the community of Siribinha is very diverse. Initially, the first researchers working in Siribinha, mainly Jose, established the main way-to-go about doing research in this community. Jose's ethnographic methods, in which he integrated in the community by living there for a longer period and taking part in all those practices that determine most of Siribinha's fishing culture and daily lives, was what motivated students of the first ACCS course, such as Ana and Camilla, to join this project.

4.3.1 THE CONTEXT OF INTERACTION: THE OIL SPILL

It is important to note that my own interactions and that of the UFBA team with the community has been somehow marked by the oil spill disaster that from September 2019 onwards devastated the northern Brazilian beaches and estuaries, and therefore also Poças and Siribinha. I got closer to the community of Siribinha through activities around these oil spills. But most significantly, in this context, next to the bonding, also tensions within the community and between the UFBA team and the community, could be acerbated.

For instance, the peculiar context of the oil spills had given an extra layer of dilemmas to the group. The planned fieldtrip was strongly overshadowed by the enormous amount of oil spills that reached the coast in October. We were uncertain about the possible toxicity in fish in the estuary, but we felt it was irresponsible to eat it. For months many people in the coastal region of Bahia stopped eating (and thus buying) fish. However, a lot of Siribinha's population, a fishing community, was still eating fish, crustaceans, and mollusks. Some said there was no oil at all, some said there was a big oil problem but luckily enough the fish was not toxic, and others stated it might be toxic but that they have nothing else to eat because they are unable to sell their fish. The vegetarians and vegans were well off, they had never eaten fish during the trips, but what about the rest?

We discussed this within the UFBA team. Nobody, including Lucas knew how to deal with this. "we should discuss this with everybody going to the field, it is critical that we do not harm the trust we have built with the community, especially dona Luara who always cooks for us". Would we take the risk to intoxicate ourselves to be sure we do not 'teach them a lesson? Were we otherwise seem to not stand on their side, or misvalue their capabilities for evaluating the possible toxicity?

4.3.2 GUIDING INTERACTIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY

Because of the more dominant position of Lucas as lead professor in the group, my first impressions on the UFBA team's vision and ambitions regarding participatory research in Siribinha were mostly Lucas's visions. I could tell he is very seriously worried about the 'right way' to collaborate with the community of Siribinha. His aim, and therefore automatically, the UFBA team's aim is to engage in bottom-up, non-imposed, collaborative research that should be helping the community of Siribinha, he clarified. He would often state 'we need to give something back to the community, especially during our project'. Later in his interview he acknowledged that not all individual projects have participation as its main objective. "Right now, only Fernanda's project is really working with participatory methods in Siribinha" he said "but the other projects are important, because they inform the other participatory works we do at the schools". For example, the ethno-taxonomic models studied by Pedro were used as material for the schools where local knowledge and scientific knowledge were integrated in a participatory manner.

During our talks Lucas elucidated he had found his own practices were too dominant "without noticing I start to dominate the whole workshop (...) I'm just....how to say...I get very excited with these kinds of processes. I don't let others talk". He also explained he would be very much focused on creating an action plan fast. "I am very pragmatic" and this attitude somewhat scares some of the teachers and community members we work with" he explained. I was pretty impressed by the amount of self-reflection and self-critique that he naturally and openly spoke about. It seemed to slide off his shoulders without belittling his ego. Although he acknowledged that he could better stay out of some of the researching activities, he did try to get a grip on how each researcher interacted with the community. For example, by briefing the researchers on how to deal with the ethical dilemmas due to the oil spill. "Let's try to avoid friction in that respect" Lucas had said.

4.3.3 BIRD SPECIES IN THE MANGROVES

Felipe had known Siribinha already as a kid. Still, it wasn't until the AACCS that he integrated Siribinha in his academic career, as it was for many others of the team like Camilla, Bruna, and Thais. Felipe showed to have a strong relationship with very specific people of the community that he works with, and stays more in the back without talking much to others in the village. The kind of research Felipe did was much more focused on the fishermen of the community. As soon as he saw Caio, one of the fishermen he most works with, he metamorphosed into a very open enthusiastic talkative person. With a big smile on their faces, a hug and a good clap on the back they saluted each other. It was clear that they were both happy to see each other. Felipe regarded Caio as a good friend and on a one-to-one basis fishermen Daniel and Marcos seemed more open and talkative to him as well.

Early in the morning, with the clock reaching six, he would hit the road and meet with Caio to wander into the wonderful maze of mangroves in search of birds. "The deal is that we only pay for the gasoline for the motor of the boat" he told me after I asked him how those arrangements would look like when he would need a service from the community." We make a deal with the same fishers, in my case I like to go with Caio. Also when other researchers would need a lift in a boat, the idea was to go along with some of the fishers they already worked with. He explained that he would talk with Caio about what birds they saw. Some were known to Caio, and some not. "We exchange the information we have about the birds, and we look for new ones together".

Next to the bird watching and cataloging new species found, Felipe started to train these fishermen to become eco-guides. The idea behind it was to protect Siribinha from becoming a space where big touristic promoters rip off tourists on the back of the local fishermen that would give the boat tours. Instead of wrestling up against them, now these fishermen could become eco-tourist guides themselves and be empowered to set up their own small businesses. It was unclear to me how much this idea had grown from inside the community or how much it was induced by the researchers and their search to 'benefit the community and the environment at the same time'.

Thais originally worked in the area of oceanography during her masters, focusing on education. She had therefore worked with fishing communities before. "Working again with fisher communities I was really touched" she said, "It really warmed my heart, on a personal level as well, to be able to work with fishers again" she elaborated "It is the worked I agree with and politically and socially believe in". Her initial idea was to research the process of conservation and preservation of the estuary in relation to the community of Siribinha as a wicked problem. "These are my vague ideas now, but I'm not sure exactly what direction I might move. I think it is also very important to investigate what you are investigating" she said "we'll keep in touch haha". She had joined a couple of times with the work of Felipe and Pedro, yet I didn't get to see much of her interaction with the community, and neither the intension to do so. During the week of fieldwork I had experienced, she was following Felipe and his bird watching trips. Rain was predicted for the rest of the week and Rafael couldn't go out to do his research anymore. They decided both to go back earlier. At the time it seemed to me like a lack of disposition because even with rain there was space to interact with the community, even if maybe data could not be gathered.

4.3.4 ETHNO-TAXONOMIES

One of the researchers I most accompanied was my friend Pedro that worked on creating ethno-taxonomies of birds and fishes. Pedro had a quite particular way of getting in touch with this project. Disillusioned by the first year of his PhD from Ecology in a project he was drawn into ethnoscience "Well you know, I always liked to work with traditional communities and indigenous peoples", "Why?" I asked. He studded for a second or two "hmm well...I think it has to do with my life, I also felt like I wasn't able to fit in social groups, in society at large. I feel more at ease in such communities". I kept

quiet. "And also to make a difference Esther, you know? These populations have been negated for so long".

While joining him in his interactions with the community I observed that Pedro first asks how they are doing, and afterwards asks gently if the community member has time to have a chat or answer some questions. Pedro seemed loved by, and affective with quite some community members "Aahh this one is one year old already, right?" he said when we said hi to Yasmin. Yasmin showed her little baby. "She is so beautiful!" Pedro said. They smiled a little eulogized and moved on. Sir Fabio was his absolute favorite, he told me while walking up to his house. Pedro and I sat down on the parapet in front of the house towards him. After we chit chatted about how everyone was doing, he introduced me while complimenting Fabio. "You see Esther, this man is one of the wisest men I know. He knows everything about fish, birds, he showed me a lot of things. He holds a lot of very valuable knowledge". Sir Fabio laughed heartily "well well" he said "I told him what I know, what I don't know I have not told him". Also with dona Luara, our hostess, he seemed quite close. She liked joking around a lot with Pedro, and Pedro knew very well how to joke back. "So where are all your girlfriends Pedro?" she said eye-winking when we just had arrived in Siribinha "Aaaahh dona Luara, you like the gossip don't you?" he laughed loudly "I have a girlfriend now, she is in Salvador". "Aaah you have girlfriend don't you" She almost sounded disappointed up until Pedro went over to her and showed a photo on his phone. "Aah she is very pretty" dona Luara said.

However, later that evening he warned that he felt some people in the community disliked him "I feel some people don't like me too much anymore, or at least they don't feel like answering my questions because as soon as I go out to the street they quickly go into their houses. That makes me really sad and insecure. Maybe last time I was too much on top of them...". He had become aware that some fishermen he still needed to interview for his data to be complete, were just not up for it. This time he assured "I will try once more, but I don't want to be pushy. If he does not want to talk to me it's sad but that's the way it is, no?".

4.3.5 THE PARTICIPATORY MEETINGS

To supervise and accompany the work of Fernanda in organizing participatory meetings, Mariana, a professor in the political department of the UFBA, was brought into the project. She was quite upfront about her ambitions "I just hope they will find a way to better their life circumstances the way they want. Socially, spiritually, economically in any way they want. The final goal of the participatory workshop in my view (s) is the organization or auto-organization of the community for them to be able to change their world for the better (...) I hope this conservation units will be really created around the mangroves and that the counselor brings the most democratic form possible forward, with presence and seats for the community, and that the community can accompany these development either directly or more indirectly". She went on situating her work in society as a whole "Because I know these communities are a bit refused and marginalized within this government, so I think it is important for them to internally work together to be able to resist, and have more resistance to development that does not favor them.". Mariana had clear political and personal ambitions with the project, her experience with other communities and the fact that she was a professor in political sciences seeped through in how she showed off her ambitions within the project. When I asked about how first contact was for Mariana she said "I present myself rather formally, as a researcher from the UFBA (...) I don't talk about anything personal nor ask them about personal questions"

One of these main spaces and places of interaction and collaboration are the meetings and participatory workshops that Fernanda and Mariana organized. They used a framework developed for organizing participatory planning, and instigating community members to think about their community and reflect on the problems they see, and organize ways to act upon it. In the first

workshops that Fernanda and Mariana had organized, they divulged very strongly. Fernanda and herself passed by door by door to invite the community to the workshops “but later we decided they themselves could be the ones communicating about the workshops and inviting other community members to join.” Fernanda has a similar approach in the initial contact with community members, she shows up, says hi, and asks how they are doing.

After the participatory workshop I had joined, I saw some of the internal social conflicts that take over Siribinha’s community. It was the clear disillusion many of the community members had that had been most active in doing communitarian work in the form of collective action. “We keep cleaning and the next morning they come and throw their shit there again, it makes no sense” Jessy said with clear irritation, “yes and they talk about us that we are crazy! Laura almost yelled. “I’m done with being discredited for doing this work, which is so much needed, and everybody should do” Carlos spoke with a soft and low voice that sounded discouraged. The room filled with nodding “Yeah” and “ahumm”s. “in the end I know how this is going to be in some years, Siribinha will not exist anymore and it will be our own fault” Carlos said with a weighty and emotionally charged voice. The group stayed quiet. As well Fernanda as myself were struck by this bitter and yet painfully realistic comment. I became susceptible for some gloomy vibe that completely subsumed the meeting.

As much as Fernanda was trying to stir the meeting to some positive actions that the group could engage in as a group, she tried to not guide the outcomes of the meeting. She focused on taking a facilitating role. Sometimes when the group stayed very quiet, she became more suggestive to keep the conversation going. Personally, I had the urge to come in a couple of times to get the conversation going or to organize the different thoughts that were shared. With patience and letting go of some of the things that were shouted, she managed for the group to come up with a new action plan that included who was responsible, what they needed for it, a date to show the time by which certain actions were to be done, and a somewhat more cheerful and hopeful sensation within the group. Mostly, I felt within the group there was respect for one another and although enthusiasm sometimes rallied into a tumultuous whole, in general, the community members listened to each other.

Besides me and Fernanda, no other researcher of the group joined the participatory meetings. Right above the communal hall where the participatory meetings took place Pedro was watching the football match of the youngsters of the village, that played there every week. Felipe and Thais were busy with other work they said, and it became clear to me the strong ‘participatory’ aim of the research project was not so much alive inside the UFBA team itself. ‘Participation’ leaned mostly on the shoulders of Fernanda and her personal project and was therefore not part of the others’ interest. Consequently, others in the group seemed to take it as a given that it was Fernanda’s role and not theirs to actively interact and facilitate with the community as a whole. It appeared they did not see the importance of their own role in either the participatory meetings, or in developing deeper connections with the community members present at these meetings.

4.3.6 IMMERSION

After Jose, Ana had been one of the first to join the project in Siribinha. Mesmerized by the tact Jose had with the community, how much he was loved by women, men, kids of the fishers and those that had other professions, Ana became really hyped for the project. She explained his strategy to do research was to become part of the community as far as possible and connect on an emphatic level with them. “The community loved him!” Ana said. “I learned from him, by walking along with him. When he left I went to catch aratu in the mangroves with the fisher women alone”. As more UFBA team members had elucidated, Ana had also been very disappointed by her graduate degree in biology. “All those positivist-driven biologists that seemed to take themselves separate from the things they studied. That strong division between nature and humans really disheartened my passion for

biology". A small smile brightened up her face: "Up until I met Jose and Lucas and went to Siribinha for the first time. They were my saviors! I'm kidding. But no actually, in some way they really were that for me". The way Jose really was *with the community*, and not just *going to the community*" she said making a parenthesis with both her hands up. "the way he went and lived with fishers and those seafood gatherers, how he got stuck in the Mangroves and how he went with them to fish at sea. His respect for the community, and the way you could see a truly reciprocal relationship between them really got me in love with this project. I thought to myself, is this also science? Then I actually can believe in it!".

When asked Camilla what motivated her to join the project in the first place, a personal and somewhat sensitive story unfolded "You know Esther, I was demotivated by my graduation of biology. I thought I was going to learn about the relationship with the plants and animals my grandmother talked about. You see, my family is from the interior, from a little town. Which is part of the poor rural areas of Bahia. This is where I grew up, my grandma is there still. Therefore, I was raised with local knowledge of my grandma and I thought I was going to investigate more of that studying Biology at the UFBA. Nothing less was true, it was all so focused on research, results, quantitative methods." She put up an ugly and yet bored face. "The mainstream biology, is a way of seeing the world that kills other ways of seeing the world, if you get what I mean." I nodded, "In that process I got to know ethnobiology, and later the project. It was that respect for the community, respect for their knowledge, and the search for horizontalizing those kind of relationships that truly made me very eager to join. When I saw the Jose's relationship with the professors of the school, so affective, I got completely passionate about what was happening there". I waow-ed for a second before being able to ask any follow up questions. Her eyes had started to become sparkling, and with this beautiful story.

Both Ana and Camilla had started off in Siribinha some time ago, they were the first students to join the project after Jose and Lucas had initiated it. Both their approach to research was founded in similar beliefs of what a good approach to research, methodology and methods was. To me it seemed that for Jose as well as Ana and Camilla, really getting close with the community and having a reciprocal relationship was a main priority. Creating a connection through friendship, empathy and the will to want to get to know the other. "It is important that you get to know their ways of living by doing" Ana said. "We have to be careful not to just 'use' the community for our projects". Camilla clarified this issue even more for me "Between Salvador and Siribinha there is a lot of distance. Their reality has nothing to do with our reality here". When as a researcher you go into the field and take part in their activities, talk with them, and get to know them, then you start to have a little insight into their community, she stated. She argued you need to understand and immerse yourself in the community before you can know what the spaces are in which contribution could be more beneficial or welcome. "Not just as researchers, but as humans as well" Camilla affirmed. "We can start to get an understanding of how we can help or what we can bring to the community, as long as we keep that one-to-one interest in getting to know the other".

"First" Camilla said "It is important to respect the community teachers and their times. I bring material and in a process of creation we think of teaching material or nice ideas to use in the schools altogether". She told me how she would go about and double check with the teachers all the time "do you think that is important as well? What do you think? Are we going in a good direction, what else is important to you?". She explained it is not just about asking these questions, because you can get easy answers to them. To get true answers about what they think, they need to know you and your motivations and trust you. "This doesn't happen overnight".

Once I went into the mangroves at 5 in the morning with some of the fisherwomen". She seemed to tell the story like it was a fairytale told to kids at night. "The community was kind of making fun of me

'Are you sure little girl, are you gonna botar covo¹⁰?'. They laughed at me quite a bit thinking 'hah that girl is not gonna fish anything'. But when I came back with all my legs in the mud up until my knees, filthy, stinky but with a smile on my face that attitude changed. Of course it is just a nice experience for me, and also for the fisher women, but it is actually more than that. " Her expression got serious again "Practicing, doing, and getting dirty like they do every day was also a way of showing my respect to them". She stated that the community would give value to that and feel recognized. To generate empathy, for her, it seems this kind of bonding experiences are what in the end matters most "It was a way to say, hey I value what you go through every day." she said. "There are some people that really... well...to some extent.... I didn't think you would....'I'm sorry", she suddenly stopped her sentence and became a bit shy, "you really surprised me in terms of your disposition". She explained she thought it was nice how it seemed like I really went into the community and also stayed with the community. "It is one thing to go to the community, it is something else to be with the community, you get me?".

Camilla elaborated on this aspect as well "Work in the community is not just any kind of work, it is very delicate, and time consuming. It takes time before you can really bond with each other, and then reinforce those ties and relationships, before it becomes really natural. Just after that process trust can start to grow. It is a slow process, it needs continuity, it needs presence." You cannot understand many of the fishing traditions in Siribinha if you don't take a part in them. Gustavo had commented about the same issue while I took a walk with him around the UFBA faculty, "Immersion is important also because there are internal conflicts in the community that are sensitive topics like for example tourism and conservation, you don't get to really understand them unless you have spent some time with them. It is also bad because these people that do not become close to the community, also miss out on a lot of vital information," he said. "A lot of information goes from one to the other orally and in practice. If researchers do not go through that process, they cannot see that."

4.3.7 PAR AND THE OIL SPILLS

Here I was, left alone in dona Luara's house. The rest of the UFBA team had left on Friday. A white and blond semi-Dutch master student from a privileged university ready to 'work with' the local community of Siribinha. This given, gave space for the voices (and readings) of decolonial, feminists, and critical activist scholars that had already permeated in my mind, prosecuting me from the beginning. Was my presence reenforcing a colonial reality?

What still makes me most uncomfortable in this respect is the fact that I started raising money through a crowdfunding campaign when the oil spill happened September and October of 2019. Yet this was before I first got to the community. The crude oil spill was immense and devastated the northern coast of Brazil. The crowdfunding campaign aimed at sponsoring safety equipment and other things that the community would need. Still in Salvador, the oil spills started to show up in great numbers. If they had reached the city beaches by now -I thought to myself- how much oil had already stranded on Siribinha's beaches, and worse, into its mangroves estuary!? Videos of bare footed fishers taking leaps of sticky crude oil spread in the Ethno-Siribinha app. Was the Lab not involved in research there? Wasn't it their responsibility to try and do anything!?

I asked Lucas if the ethno-Siribinha group was not supposed to do something to show their support. "If you as a group are working with them, shouldn't you all be working together now as well to show some solidarity!?" He told me it was a good point, but at the moment there was no money, and it was hard to help without good equipment. Of course, the health and safety of the UFBA team was also his responsibility, and we couldn't just expose the young researchers to the risks of crude oil, just like that. But as he solidarized with the community and my actions he helped me all throughout the process,

¹⁰ Quoloquial for 'getting dirty in the mud'

being a great support. He definitely did feel responsible for doing something and showing solidarity to the community in the midst of this disaster.

Initially, we discussed that we needed the community's consent to pull this off and therefore Lucas had texted Carlos, one of the fishers of Siribinha to ask what his thoughts were on the matter. Since I had never been in Siribinha yet, I had no idea how much Carlos was representative of the rest of the community. And at that moment, I did not give that too much of my attention or a priority. There was a natural disaster going on that would horribly impact the fisher communities of the northern eastern coast of Brazil. We had to do something now, I thought. Ethical dilemmas are now of minor importance, I was saying to myself to calm any uncomfortable questions rising up. Carlos had reacted positively to our proposal and we took that as a green light to go forward. A couple of weeks later, Lucas and I spammed around the video of the crowdfunding campaign.

Back in a big and empty house of dona Luara, this very action that I took, started to feel somewhat uncomfortable. I did not really know the community, so how did I know for sure they would support or be happy with my actions? To the somewhat (un)trained and most cynical eye, my action could look more essentialist than a mainstream technology transfer inducing the newest GMO's to 'help' farmers. The same eye would skeptically but rightfully raise the voice that by 'helping' the community with a crowdfunding campaign I deterministically set away the community as if their common, inherent, innate and unchanging characteristic would be that of 'helplessness'. What would be a priority this time? Take action within the means I have to support the community in this natural disaster or stay back to first understand my role in this, and be more humble to the self-determining capacity of the community itself. I decided to go for the first, opening up the doors to yet a whole new set of ethical and moral dilemmas to be encountered as the crowdfunding campaign proceeded.

All in all, the interaction with the community was very diverse. After some weeks I could sense there was kind of a divide in the UFBA team. Some researchers saw immersion as the only possible method for these kinds of university-community interactions to be truly participation and meaningful; others engaged in action oriented research as facilitators only, without necessarily becoming friends with the community; and last, those researchers less outspoken or interested about participation in the first place.

In terms of methods, both Fernanda and Mariana seemed to overlap with Ana and Camilla in the recognition that elements of trust, continuity, and empowerment were essential for this kind of participatory work and that the main objective of the project had to be the benefits for the community. Yet, neither Fernanda nor Mariana did however see immersion into the community as a necessity for it perse. Although they did see it as a good practice and 'nice' to do so, they as well as Pedro, Felipe and Thais did not seem to take it as a precondition for their research. Additionally, I found it had not been standard practice, and might have even be seen an uncomfortable, to directly ask the community members if they see the work of the UFBA bringing relevant and positive changes. In order to get honest answers, go beyond the initial politeness, I could well imagine what Camilla, Ana and Gustavo had been huddling about when they highlighted the importance of trust for letting people really speak their minds.

Accordingly, different degrees of closeness seemed to exist that reflected the differences in personalities of each researcher as well as their different methods and approaches to research. Still, at first sight the UFBA-researchers seem to have an overall good and respectful relationships with the community members they interacted with. Some were warmer and friend-like and others stayed more polite. Be as it may, most interactions were focused on gathering data, rather than just hanging around. Pressure of the limited time each researcher had in the community during these five days of fieldwork seemed to shape the nature of these interactions. In fact, most researchers I experienced

during this week seemed to work very much siloed from each other. Each individual project had its individual aim and people were in it (in the fieldtrip) for their own gains of their own research project. Even though this is understandable to some extent, I found it appalling to see how much each seemed to separate their own work from one another, except for Ana and Camilla, who did a lot of their work together in Poças. As a result, I found not many researchers inspired each other in terms of these methods and approach of how to interact with the community. In theory they did, as Lucas had preached about its importance, but in the act of doing research everyone seemed to be quite doing their own thing. Even if stories and reflections on the day's work were shared in the evening time, this did not instigate any change in actual practice the next day.

5. THE ODDS OF PARTICIPATION

"Our refusal to examine difference and the distortions surrounding it are what separate us, not the differences themselves."

- Smith et al., (2010)

While moving back and forth between being in Siribinha with its community and being in Salvador with the UFBA team, I started to reflect on what I was experiencing. For some parts, I felt uncomfortable with the way the research was going and how I was engaging with it myself. On the other side, I had seen a lot of beautiful connections and reactions from community members that gave hope about the participatory potential of the project. I will dive into the interaction between the community and the UFBA team to explore dynamics inside the community of Siribinha, visualizing their attitude towards the UFBA team and the project as a whole, and relating these findings with theories around participatory research as well as the other way around, to create a sequence between theory and practice. To make this sequence more vivid I highlight and italicize some quotes or own reflections that help you to guide through this story.

5.1 THE PROMISE OF PARTICIPATION?

In the following section, I attempt to shed light on participatory processes in more detail. Doing so, I will analyze to what degree the participatory practices can be mirrored with participatory research as has been conceptualized in PAR and decolonial and feminist methodologies. At the same time, I use my observations and analysis of the participatory practices to ignite the gaps in PAR, and feminist and decolonial theories. This lays bare a wide range of complex attitudes that exist and keep unfolding within the UFBA team's and the community's interactions. This analysis highlights interests, (lack of) motivations, and practices of the community of Siribinha. What struck me after my first months is that participation might have been part of the initial project. Still, the extent to which participation took place in terms of setting the stage for researching collaboratively, initiating a project, or parting from what the community wanted to investigate was not the building block for the project as I had hoped.

5.1.1 SHARING OF RESEARCH GOALS AND AMBITIONS

In getting close to the community, I tried to capture the overall view of the community towards the UFBA team. Mixed feelings developed concerning the work of the UFBA researchers. Those who have had most contact with researchers, and especially those who have had contact with several different researchers by participating in their interviews or taking them along in their daily activities mainly had

great trust in the UFBA team. Yet, overall, those with less contact with the UFBA were less positive about the UFBA, and some even distrustful of the good intentions of the UFBA team and the project as a whole. The short stories and anecdotes that follow will be brought as a compilation of snapshots showcasing the general attitude of many community members towards the UFBA team, and the project as a whole. Much of this has been shaped by how well they understood the researchers' goals, ambitions, and interests.

Community's understanding

Most of the community did not truly know what the project really entailed, the ambitions and goals of the individual researchers, and how they relate to each other. This is not to say that the research was never communicated to the community. Still, it became obvious that the means of communication had not reached a great part of the community and was for many not sufficient even to understand what was going on. This is a key element because, the phase of informing, even when this is not even called 'participation', is the first prerequisite to eventually collaborating. Besides, not grasping what the UFBA team did in Siribinha and not understanding these ambitions, goals, and interests invoked distrust for some community members.

When asked if they felt the UFBA team was in some ways benefiting them, most of them answered "Yes for sure, a lot". When I would ask in what way, considerably less answers were given. Like Simone who answered "very good, very good" as if it was a mantra she repeated it when I asked how they had done something positive. When I tried to go deeper into what made the university's presence so good, she became somewhat shy. Slowly moving her head up and down "they it's, good, it's good". I ignored it and went full with spirits for the next question "Do you understand their project, and what it is about?".

"Yes, yes I like what they say. But often I don't understand what they are saying..... I don't understand no. I like that they come and talk. I don't understand but they are good people".

Maria who had come by as well added "they are always very respectful and nice to us as well". Others like Rosa and Stephanie, two middle aged women who often helped other fisherwomen to peel aratu (or 'break' aratu as it is called literally) could bring a bit more specificity in that. "They do stuff with the environment here right?". Others were very confident, "yes I know what they are doing, something with the environment, right?" Nati said with a big smile on her face. Quite some fishers told me they liked the researchers and the fact that they were working in Siribinha (for different reasons) but still did not know what the aim of the research was, or what was happening to the information that was given "I have absolutely no idea, what, for what. But I would like to know" Daniela, the workout trainer that trained the women every day, said. Still taking a breath, I asked if she felt that the research benefited her "I don't know if their research is for that or not. I would like to know why they are doing this research, to know if it is for the wellbeing of this place or...(...) I don't know if they are worried about us or not. But they do care at least a bit because of the issue of waste here, of increasing tourism".

While sitting in front of Williams house reflecting upon the UFBA team and their projects he looked at me confused: "Yes they value what I am saying (..) but they say that they would come back with the results, but I haven't received any since then. I have no idea what they are doing". Others like Ramon were more worried about where that information was going:

"I am really worried about what happens with all that information we give. We give, we give, it goes out of here, and we have no idea where it ends up. Personally, I think, they note those fish species we mentioned to restrict you even more from fishing in the future"

He was clearly displeased. Seu Bernardo did not seem pissed but shared the same worries. While sitting in his plastic chair in front of his house, he made clear he did not understand why researchers

needed information about fish and birds. "I know that one day they will explain their work, but for now they just take, take, and take and they don't come back to say for what it is". He added that he would like to know : "You give answers but you don't know what the significance will be of that". William made clear "The truth is...we give them information about what we know. But up until now nothing has gotten to us, nothing" he said he even did not receive information about what the researchers knew".

I would like to at least have the same information they have. They come and ask some questions, then they come back and ask the same questions". He repeated this later again "I really don't understand what you guys are doing, you come and ask the same questions every time I really don't understand haha". He laughed a bit awkwardly, it seemed to me he felt a bit ashamed to some extent of not understanding what had been going around all these years, while at the same time feeling a bit bad about being more critical towards the work of the researchers.

One evening Daniel addressed the issue of the researchers impacting fishing regulations. "No but they want to make us stop fishing with that project (referring to the conservation units)". Julia, his wife, told him to shut up, and explained a different version of what was going on. "The thing is they want to create a project with benefits for the community, if not now in the future. But we are worried that if tourists start to come, who will have control over that? We don't want to grow to please tourism, we want something that pleases our own community". She went on addressing yet another painful truth, hitting the nail on the head "the truth is that not so many (community members) participate in those workshops, if two or three agree it doesn't mean the rest agrees". "They want us to work together better, and help with conservation" Julia said. Even though Julia seemed to know quite a lot about the aims of the UFBA team, in her view she still had no idea "to be honest, I don't know what they are doing in the field. I don't really know what their work is about".

Practitioners with many years of experience in PAR processes (such as Buckles, 2013; Chevalier & Buckles, 2021; B. L. Hall & Tandon, 2017; Long et al., 2016; Minkler, 2004; Schinke & Blodgett, 2016; Stanton, 2014) show that sharing knowledge and being transparent about motivation and aims is the sharing very minimum of openness and a required for equitable and respectful university-community interaction in research projects. Taking this issue seriously is rather the first baby step needed to kick off a PAR process, or any participatory process for that sake, than a goal in itself. Unfortunately, even if the UFBA team had repeatedly told what their work consisted of, it was not done in a way that community members could absorb.

Sharing of research goals and aims during the fieldtrip

These conversations gave me an uneasy feeling while recalling how the project and the different subprojects were communicated during the field trip that I engaged in. The week I had spent in Siribinha with the UFBA team, and I had joined them in their activities and interviews, I had not seen any of the UFBA-researchers go into much detail about why and for what they were doing this research. It was one of the first questions I asked myself when I saw the kind of interaction between different UFBA team members (mostly Thais, Felipe, Pedro and Fernanda) and the community members. A couple of more specific formats of communication became apparent to me. The communication was done very broadly, it mostly communicated with the same communication techniques and strategies (those close to conventional education), and end goals and aims of the researcher were not communicated.

As I followed Pedro, Fernanda and some of Felipe and Thais in the field, I could see they tried to tradeoff between reminding a community member what their research was about while not being too repetitive and stodgy. As a result, the community members were reminded in a very broad way like "as you know I work with fish and birds" or "since I work with environmental conservation...". This was not the first time they had explained about their project. Still, keeping in mind I myself needed some weeks

of full participation with the UFBA team to get only a slight grip on everything that was going on, it is little surprise the project would be mix up or forgotten by the community, especially for a community member that might have talked to several researchers.

I also remember Fernanda restating the theme of her research when she spoke to different community members "as you know, with the meeting we are trying to bring the community together to take actions together in relation to conservation. And also to bring to light what you guys would want yourselves. So, it would be really nice if you could join". Also, when she interviewed Luis, one of the older fishermen and one of the two men that would be more often present at the participatory meetings she organized "Well as you know seu Luis, I work with conservation and collective action in the community...and I was wondering if I could ask you some questions if that would be okay, I could also come back another moment" She said apologetically. "no it fine you can ask me" he answered while keeping sowing his fishnet. Even if their form of interaction seemed open, I wasn't sure if Seu Luis really understood what these questions were for, or what exactly the point was of Fernanda's research there.

Weeks later I sat with him on almost exactly the same spot. In the morning we both had joined a big group to clean the beaches from oil, and besides the hard work we had laughed quite a lot that day. He had given up on fishing that day to be able to join the group with cleaning activities, and was now taking the rest of the day off resting until we would meet each other at our weekly football matches. His daughter passed by with his grandchild and the four of us hungout, enjoying the laughter of the little baby girl. "And now you are still going to do some more sports!?" her daughter asked us with big eyes. We looked to each other and smiled "I will go, yes" he said "Well then I cannot stay behind right?" I added. After his daughter had gone inside the house, I asked him about the different research projects he had participated in. "I really like what they are doing, I think it is good they are here" something I heard before from other community members. When I asked him if he knew what they were doing, he answered: " well something with the environment of this place". I asked if he knew for what the information was that he was asked to answer on.

"That they didn't tell me...I actually don't know what is happening to that information, I answered many questions many times (...)but it is really nice when they are here. But you know what, I would like to know what happens with all the information I give them, cause I don't know at all "

He suddenly sounded a bit more displeased. I told him I could very well understand he wanted to know that. "Yeah I would actually like for them to tell me better". He stayed quiet for some seconds and added "but they only want good for us, they are good people". Seu Luis had participated in many of the participatory workshops, He had been interviewed several times by different UFBA team members, and he is also one of the active male members in the group of community volunteers that went to clean oil spills as well as garbage. Still he did not seem to know what the aim was of all of this.

Fernanda had shared her insecurity about this matter in that first week I spend with her there. Right after she had talked to Luis, I had shared this doubt with her as well while we walked back to the house on the main route. I asked if she felt that people knew what she was doing. She looked a bit hopelessly and answered "No, I don't feel like all of them actually know or understand, and the frustrating thing is I have told them time and over again during the participatory meetings. It is not like I never shared what my research was about, but they somehow do not internalize it or after a while they forget". Later when we discussed some of my initial results in the UFBA team, she supplemented my argument stating "we might have to think about different ways to communicate our project and ambitions with them". Fernanda was quite aware of this issue and it clearly worried her as well. She had called to Lucas' attention to share this worry.

A different attitude I found with Pedro, when I asked him to what extent the community knew what he was doing he explained "I always start by restating what I research to make sure they do not forget....And I think most fishermen know I work with fishes and birds". And indeed, when I joined him for his interviews he (as Fernanda did) restated that he worked with fish and birds. Yet, what did he exactly study about birds and fish? And what did the local community really have to do with it? What was the eventual goal of his research? Weeks later, in my one-to-one talks with him I asked him to what extent the fishermen he interviewed knew what he was researching. "Well... as you have seen yourself I explain what things I am researching right...like I tell them 'as you know I am interested in fish and birds' but I don't go too much into detail". Why not? I asked him a bit too snappy "well... euhh... "he said " I mean I don't think they will understand if I talk about partial overlaps right? Hahaha". I kept quiet for a bit and then responded "but do they know what the goal of your research is?" I found Pedro a little befuddled by the question I kept coming back to. He rolled his eyes staring to the deep, overthinking my question.

"Well because of the criteria of objectivity, I of course cannot share too much with them what the end goal or aim of the research is because then they might answer in a certain way, and their answers might become biased, right".

I thought that last comment about objectivity was interesting, and somehow not surprising in the context of the institute of Biology and how difficult it already was to use qualitative methods as Fernanda had explained. Let alone, deciding to put the aim of participation before 'objectivity' requirements. It is clear neutrality and objectivity in science is searched for here (Harding, 1977), the illusion of having eyes from nowhere (Haraway, 1988) and that as soon as the community members would know what his research was really about the answers he would get would be less 'true' is very much pointing at the issue many feminist scholars worry about (Harding, 2015; Longino, 1993; Wylie & Sismondo, 2015). Besides of not creating stronger or more relevant science this way, this 'god trick' and the supposed value-free science were possible encourages the marginalization, since policies could indeed stem from these 'neutral' data (Crasnow, 2013).

Objectivity getting in the way of sharing knowledge

I had a flashback of the interview Pedro had done with Daniel, and the conversation I had with Daniel some weeks after he had been interviewed. After we were politely welcomed in his back yard Pedro started "so as you know I've been doing some studies on fishes and I wanted to ask something about the fishing period and the closing period¹¹. Do you receive any closing period at all?". Daniel, looked up and kept quiet for a second. He started to explain he received some but he didn't receive all the different closing periods. He added that people had been receiving money for not fishing and then they would still go and fish. "and you have to have an official fisher's license, which takes years to come, to even be able to get in otherwise you get nothing. But you know more people live from fishing" Daniel started to sound a bit indignant by the situation, clear frustration lied under these issues. "ahummm I see...so for which fish do you get closing period" Pedro asked again ignoring or evading the Daniel's frustration. The interview went on and I found that Pedro wanted to evade any conversation that might become too sensitive or emotional. At the same time, to me it gave the impression Pedro was not showing interest in the problems Daniel himself was facing, by ignoring these issues and turning back to his research questions. Daniel politely went on answering his specific questions about the ovulation time of different kinds of fishes, but somehow I found him a bit dejected.

¹¹ Called 'defeso' in Portuguese, referring to the period when hunting or fishing is prohibited. This closed season should coincide with the reproduction period of the species

One evening, weeks after, Daniel and I were hanging out in front of his house. We discussed his worries with the presence of researchers. "Since the government wants to prohibit more fishes to be fished, in reality, these kind of research projects are a threat for us (...) In the end of the day, any new fish that is being prohibited to fish, is a loss for a fisher". He recalled that moment in which I accompanied Pedro to do an interview

"remember that day with Pedro? He started to talk about shrimp, and there I told him I was receiving money for the closing period of shrimp. Afterwards that troubled my mind because I used to fish shrimp but I am not doing that anymore, so therefore maybe I should not even receive the closing period, you get me?"

I asked if he ever addressed that to him later. "Yes I did, I went up to him and asked, hey that research about shrimp is not going to harm me right? He said 'no no if I could I would help but, for sure not harm' but I stayed worried you know that they will cut the closing period of shrimp". Daniel shared all he knew about closing period, even if this might have been sensitive information, but did not actually really know or trust what the information was, and that fact seemed to make him more distrustful. Back to my talk with Pedro I felt not so much at ease. He thought this was the right way of doing research, and who was I to tell him otherwise? After all he was doing his PhD and I was only a master student. I decided to tell him what I had found, and gave the example of Daniel. He looked at me shocked, with a straight face and in all seriousness. "Ooh boy I can't believe what you're telling me, I need some time to rethink and wrap my head around this issue. It is indeed really important, and thank you for letting me know buddy. I mean I feel terrible right now...but thank you really, I appreciate it". These examples show how complicated it can be to have to navigate between adhering to conventional academic scientific criteria on the one hand, while engaging in decolonizing and meaningful participatory research on the other, in which openness about ambitions and goals of the research is the minimum requirement.

Lucas' perception

In his first interview with me, Lucas stated he thought a great part of the community knew and understood those returns. "Those coming for the summertime, or only on the weekends would probably not really know about the project but most of the fishers in Siribinha do know" he stated. "Then of course some fishermen know not so much, but mostly that is because they are not the ones that know most, they are not the traditional experts". The people in the participatory workshops are the ones who know most because during those workshops, he told me they talked quite often about the project as a whole. In theory, as Lucas proposed, all community members participating with the team, whether doing an interview, taking a researcher out to fish, or any other activity, should explain very well what the project is about to the people they interact with. Besides, it has always been one of the main principles to communicate to the community what the UFBA team is doing in Siribinha. He had also given various presentations in municipality halls and other public spaces in Siribinha explaining his project to the municipality "and I also invited the community members to come so they would understand more of the project and see how it was proceeding". Yet, it seems the strategies used to communicate that kind of information had not really landed for most of the community members as I have storied before. I sensed some hopelessness in Fernanda's voice when she said "I know that even those participating in my workshop don't know what I am doing when I ask them, even though I told them a couple of times during the workshop. And I shared this with Lucas before but I am not sure it really got into him". When I asked Lucas for the first time if the community knew about their work, he was confident "yes of course, we talk about it all the time".

After our talk I addressed that I had found a very different reality. He planned a new meeting with urgency to discuss this issue with the whole team. "We might need to do some clarification. It is key

that we write a document that makes it clear what we do and what our interests are, because the community doesn't know. This is the moment to write down the code of conduct". Camilla mentioned "I really don't know if another letter or documents will help" I added "Maybe it is just a question of also going more door to door and starting to make more contact and create relationships with those people that have less relationship with the UFBA". Before I could move an eyelash, he had taken up on those comments, and quickly reframed his point "yes of course, your results show we need to find other forms of communication. This is a matter of utter importance, still we can also make a simplified version of our code of conduct and share it with them". Some 'yes' and 'ahuum" were spread throughout the lab. "What is clear" he said at the end of the meeting "is that we cannot rely only on those workshops, we need to think of other ways". "It is very important that we make clear to the community that what we are trying to do is for the wellbeing of the community" Mariana said. Felipe also elaborated on that aspect when I talked with him afterwards "we really have to improve in this aspect" he confessed. "I think they don't exactly know what we do with the data we gather ". He told me he always talked "but I'm still not sure that they know". In his view, it was more important to make clear what the intentions of researchers are for the community. Mariana said "This year might be the time to try and make sure more community members are informed about that ".

As Godemann (2008) states in the context of transdisciplinary research projects, it is especially important to enable an efficient exchange of unshared information to improve the quality of the problem-solving process in research. By planning collaboratively how findings will be shared at the initial stage, the likelihood is increased that community members will be motivated to join because they can influence how the research findings will be used to promote what actions (Long et al., 2016). Besides, shared knowledge is never void of relationships but always located in the development of them. Therefore it is important to clearly state the relationships within research (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). As McNamee (2010) puts it, openness and accessibility are also a requirement for doing relational research, and any kind of participatory research for that sake.

Thus, I found most of the communication on the UFBA team members research was not communicated very broadly, merely touching upon the greater theme such as 'birds and fishes' or 'conservation and the community' therefore not giving the needed background for community members to know what they were contributing to. The approach to research and how participation fitted into that idea, seemed to say 'they would not be able to grasp, what research is, what it entails, how it can be important for their future and to mediate and negotiate the ethical dilemmas that come about in university-community research interactions'. This very idea or approach struck me as being the very cause of, and on itself, undermining the community's capacity for being able to understand motivations and goals of this particular project.

Secondly, it was communicated in one and a similar way every time. Just before starting an interview or before inviting people over to participatory meetings. These forms of communication might not be most apt for a community that mostly engaged in knowing by doing. Ironically, it was exactly that empirical epistemological strategy of learning-by-doing that the UFBA team seemed to value so much, and wanted to get revalorized in this project. Yet, how was the community supposed to learn and understand the research without doing it? Without being part of the research process as a whole? As much as this empirical and experiential knowledge was valorized and taken seriously, somehow this form of learning was less given an opportunity for understanding, engaging, and driving the research process itself. With some push from Ana and Camilla, Lucas had brought some of the fishers (mostly men) to the university, to the Biology institute, and to the lab. Caio and Marcos absolutely loved it. In my conversations with them they both referred to that moment, and explained how much they had learned. Not surprisingly they had been the ones to mostly understand final aims of the UFBA team.

Third, and maybe the most important aspect, was that the UFBA team was communicating their research theme to some degree, but to a lesser extent they fore fronted their own or common goals and aims with the research they were doing. Except for Fernanda, no individual research goals were restated in the 'fieldwork' of UFBA team I joined. This does not mean these were never highlighted, yet as I had found, most community members of Siribinha did not grasp the ambitions, and came no further than "something with plants and animals' or 'something with conservation'.

5.1.2 REFLECTIONS ON THE UFBA PROJECT

Within the UFBA team

Within these first days in Siribinha, I talked with the different UFBA-members and I started a common conversation to reflect upon the benefits for the community. Together with my observations and my own action I started to grasp what the UFBA team's thoughts were with regard to the benefits for the community, something that Lucas had repeatedly highlighted. This gave not only insight on their perspectives of the benefits for the community but also a first reflection on the project as whole. I found the community had very different vision on benefits, and that either positively or negatively there was a great discrepancy between what the project did for the community. What was the nature of this discrepancy?

Since I joined the lab at the UFBA not one meeting has passed without Lucas stressing the importance of giving a return to the community that is relevant for them, and that is given during the research and not after. When I asked him for the first time if he thought the community saw this the same way, he very convinced said "Yes, because they came up with the idea (referring to Lia the first teacher they worked with), this teacher gave the idea and we just picked up on it". According to Mariana, the community members (that participated at the workshops) eyes start to shine when you talk about the eco museum. She said they all love the idea of having tourists, but only the 'good kind' of tourists. Several researchers had an initial idea about benefits.

In terms of benefits, Felipe explained that, for example, Caio was taking a lot of bird watchers to make bird watching trips in his boat. "These pay way more for such a trip than normal tourism. Now he also understands that dynamic. First, he went to catch the gacici¹² to eat, and now he knows it is precious for him". He also stated the community did not know that in the beginning, but because of the training they got to know more about their own environment. "What stays behind for the community is this seed." He referred to the exchange for knowledge and the possible benefits some of the community members could have. "you know what?" He suddenly seems to change his mind. "Actually we don't know, I don't know they are the only ones that can tell us if there is any benefit or not". When I ask if he had ever asked them he said " yes, I talk with the people I work with, I always ask, ' hey how is it going?' or ' did you like the training?'. One early morning I was standing in dona Luara's garden with Felipe. It seemed he had thought about our conversations from the night before when he said

" You know, I wanted to say that I really appreciate the research you are doing. I am in doubt quite often you know. Are we actually doing the right thing here? Are we actually benefiting the community when we think we are? I worry about these questions... I think sometimes we do more harm that we do good. At least I am afraid of it sometimes".

¹² A gacici also called 'gavião-do-mangue' (Hawk-of-mangroves) is the a bird with high ecological value, rarely spotted in northern Bahia

"I definitely see benefits for the community," Pedro told me in his interview, "in what way" I asked him. He got a little stuck....".well...I mean...the crowdfunding campaign you did for example". "And other examples?" I asked "I don't know... I haven't thought about it properly to be honest. I think it is not one project that brings a return for the community but it is rather all of those projects integrated". Pedro added that he did not see so much of a return in his own project with a somewhat disappointed voice. I was surprised he didn't, Many others, including Lucas and Ana had told me how part of his data was used in the schools which has contributed to having a very fertile conversation in class about the difference of science and traditional knowledge. After I asked Mariana *who* decided what would be a benefit for the community, she stopped for a second

"I think it is good that you're asking these questions because sometimes we as researchers think that we are doing something that gives a benefit but in reality it isn't. If we propose an action (as possible return) and they accept it, it will for sure be less effective than when they themselves are asking for a certain return. `We are working with people`".

Camilla clarified that it should not be something essentialist, but more a real exchange of getting to know each other.

"The process of getting to know the other is very important I think, and therefore you can only really bring some return to the community when you get to know the other".

According to Lucas, there have already been quite some different moments of participation in the project as a whole. This participation facilitated bringing benefits to the community. He named the participation of some fishermen who were being trained by Felipe to become eco-tour guides; the participation of the teacher from the school in Siribinha, and how that links to the knowledge of the different birds and fishes recovered and gather by Pedro and Felipe; and the participation of the community members going to the participatory workshops that beside those workshops have joined collective action of cleaning the river, mangroves and beaches from waste.

Moreover, it resulted to me that it had not been standard practice, and might have even be seen as uncomfortable, to actually directly ask the community members if they see the work of the UFBA bringing relevant and positive changes. In order to get honest answers, go beyond the initial politeness, I could well imagine what Camilla, Ana Gustavo and Bruna had been huddling about when they highlighted the importance of trust and immersion for letting people really speak up their minds.

Community of Siribinha

From the community's perspective I received very different ideas about what the UFBA team was really bringing. Some who had a closer relationship to one or more of the UBA-team members named just the presence of the UFBA team members as a benefit. Some made clear it was entertaining to have them around or they were seen as being nice company Brenda made clear she also did not really understand what was going on but she liked it "I think it is nice they come here, have a chat with us, entertain us, and guide us in somethings...I think it is good no?" It seems like she was trying to explain it was more fun when researchers were around because more would happen on the streets of Siribinha, reinforcing the beforementioned benefit of entertainment.

Others like Luis, Chico and Carolina said that the nice part of the project of the UFBA is that they all learn together, the community and the researchers. Maria, Laura, Stephanie, Yasmin and Pablo agreed, and but added that they did not know that one of those birds only lived here (referring to gacici). "I did not know, but now I am proud of that" Yasmin stated firmly. Julia also named the aspect of bringing consciousness "they come to guide the community, their role is to bring more consciousness to the community", she clearly had a bigger understanding of what was going on "They have been adding something to our live as well as we to theirs. They come with scientific knowledge, and we the people

of the soil itself, we are very knowledgeable in our own knowledge. So, it is an exchange, one learns from the other. We both win”.

Dona Luara who rents the house and cooks the meals for the researchers in Siribinha said “Yes for sure it’s good they came here, because they help with the issue of the community, right? And they help the fishermen that have boats with doing boat rides as well. We can earn a little money, it is also good for us right? All of that helps us”. Her husband Marcos added “Also you guys come here and rent the house, and that also helps right, that’s good for us”.

Seu Paolo one of the elderly of Siribinha and known to be one of the wisest told me they called him professor, and he liked it. He said he thinks it is good to share knowledge.

“If you can help them, I think you should (...) after the interview when they go away I feel good. If I was able to respond to the questions I feel good about sharing because they come all the way from there to here to interview you. So I think they valorize what I say (...) I feel like I am more special. Higher than others”.

He said the researchers are good people, he likes them. Similarly, Mariana also said she liked to be asked about the fishes. “I feel a bit flattered when they come to interview you (...) you feel a little bit important,” Simone said. Clara, one of more respected fisherwomen said she liked being interviewed for comparable reasons. “I didn’t know that those things had importance (to other people) that they were asking”. She was sitting in front of her house peeling aratu like every afternoon, when I passed by for a usual talk. She seemed to take my questions very seriously, her sincerity made me feel like there was something heavy in our conversation. “They would ask about herbs we use, how to make thee, and we didn’t know that they would...would.... ” her voice stopped abruptly, she swallowed and seemed to hold back tears. Before I started to feel my own tears come up of all the emotion I was seeing in her face, I helped her, “would what?... Care about it?”, “Yes yes that’s it” she said”. This was something that came back very often, the feeling of being respected and valued for what you know.

One late afternoon, I found Carolina sitting almost alone breaking aratu, as not happened very often. Only some kids and dogs around were using her position as a playing ground. Many fisherwomen and fishermen in the village have told me Carolina is one of the best and most expert fisher women of Siribinha. I sat down and asked if I could help. “Oh my dear, If you want to take that chair”. I had broken aratu with her before, so she knew how slow and ineffective my help would be. She did not seem to care. We broke and peeled some aratu and joked around about the guy that got himself kicked out of his house because of being drunk all the time, and now had a temporary home in a broken car just underneath the big tree of the main road. I asked Carolina, why she thought it was so nice that the UFBA research would interview her, she responded:

“I was a very shy woman...(..) I used to not talk with any stranger or new person. Sometimes even within the community itself I would not talk at all. Now with so many researchers asking me questions and about what I do, how I do it, and what I know. I have become more confident. I am not so shy anymore, that is really great”.

Some like Bruno, and his grandfather Fabio, went a step further. They explained that this learning from both sides was beautiful, not just because of the knowledge that they gained about Siribinha and its surrounding environment but also because of the relationship they build with those researchers. “aaah when I think of Jose, I get very sad. He went back to Colombia did he?” Laura said, one of Fabio’s daughters. “Also Pedro has really become a good friend, I really like him” Fabio said. The appreciation for new wisdom, no matter who or on what beliefs that knowledge was built on was extremely valuable for Fabio as well as for his grandson Bruno “I think it is wonderful if they can open up our

eyes (...) knowledge gained is always a win". I had a hard time not hugging him instantly. Suddenly his face displayed a sad and slightly angry expression.

"But what I find unfair is that they come here, stay with us, talk, and become friend with us. And then when they are done, they just leave us! That is not fair, what is left from them is saudades (missing-feeling)".

He sounded a bit indignant. "What is left whenever the researchers leave?" I asked Brenda "emptiness" she answered while she looked me straight in the eyes "look it is a small community, there are not so many people coming in and out, so then we miss the movement of the people on the streets...It is just a feeling of emptiness, the same feeling you get when there is a party which becomes empty after a while..."

Marcos confessed "I know not everybody thinks like that no, but it is hard not even a president is liked by everyone. Just imagine, he said laughing, not everyone even believes in god hahaha". "There are people that don't see it, that do not interact so much with the researchers, they think differently" he also mentioned that some would say "Ah just you and Caio are helped by the UFBA" but he immediately recalled that to the meeting everybody was welcome and that the researchers said that anyone with interest could participate. He added "afterwards they want to know how it was and stuff (...) I think well if they wanted to know, they could have just gone!". Joao said "No, their work is not going to harm our fishing activities at all, if it doesn't better the situation at least it is not gonna make it worse". Later he added "It is good that they come here and asked about these things, it is good to know that at least that somebody cares about us".

One night sitting over a cup of tea with Julia, her husband Daniel and their daughter Amanda, a conversation took place that touched upon many aspects I had seen and experienced during my time in Siribinha, and therefore is exemplifying the different attitudes I encountered. Daniel explained sometimes the researchers are seen as a threat. "There is no government for the fishers, not one, no one to help, therefore every new research that gets here, we as fishers see it as a threat". "He went on "there are already fishes that they (researchers) say are in extinction, and one takes a look and it is impossible that that fish is endangered. We as fisher, we have no other option, no alternative (...) They don't see the fishers as workers" His wife looked up embarrassed to me "What kind of nonsense are you saying!?" he went on ignoring what she has said but he rephrased a bit "the politicians, and governors, if they could, they would take away that little rights that we still have here".

Later that same evening he made a contrary comment "For me, they should turn all of this in a conservation unit before Siribinha disappears. And still" he said while making a circle with his index finger pointing at Siribinha "this all will not be here anymore in a couple of years." he continued with a heightened and alert voice "Listen what I'm saying to you Esther, this all will be gone (...) We, our own people, are destroying this place" he almost shouted. We both looked at the plate of cheese that his wife Julia had brought for everybody in front of the house to snack. We both quietly stared at the coconut tree in front of the house. Then he grabbed a piece of cheese and said in a much calmer way

"The UFBA is trying their best here....they really are. But I have to be honest here, when they suddenly arrive in a big group, we are a bit shocked and hesitant. But when they come live with us and stay for a while we feel like they actually start to care about us, because they will see the difficulty that we go through for our subsistence. A fisher has no leisure, really"

His wife was starting to get on her nerves now "Oh please cut the crap! Don't say that! Where have we been yesterday huh!?" He did not seem to be touched and kept looking straight into my eyes. He explained that it is different to have leisure at home, than to be able to go somewhere else.

"The researchers they don't say anything about that tourism that comes here, they close an eye, like the people from governors for environment. You know why? Because those people that come here, have money". "They want to set up that thing (referring training eco-guides for boat tours), but that might mean that in the future, more boats will come this way. That motor is not good, it pollutes the river a lot. During Christmas a minimum of 200 liters will be thrown into that river. That is what I mean, they think in years it will be better, but it might just get worse". While his wife got in between again saying, "what a minute" he argued that because of the project of the university more jet skis would come to Siribinha. His wife couldn't hold it "no Daniel, they don't want jet skis here at all! Don't talk about things you don't know, you are not even participating in that so shut up" while taking over the conversation "no what fishers are worried about is that they will have to map their space of use and that they might not be able to fish there anymore" Julia said. Daniel suggested the researchers could do more to help

"The researchers could do more, make an effort to really talk to us, and help us by bringing a course or something, something that might help us with fishing for example for now we don't see any of that back here".

"The project with the birds for example, there they tried. I got some books of birds for example. But they also have to show their work over there, otherwise they do not get the money to come, so it is a benefit for both".

Promises with thin consistence

Yet others saw no benefit in the researchers coming at all. It is remarkable that some of the fishers in Siribinha liked the presence of the university even though they did not see any benefit for themselves. Seu Paulo elaborated on this attitude one afternoon. He seemed to not understand the relevance of my question "Rapaz, I don't think it is important to know if they bring a benefit to the community or not. It is ok if they are here anyway". He told me he worried about future generations, about the kids living now, they will probably not find any fish. When I asked if he felt the researchers were helping with that to some extent he immediately said "no, they only ask about fishing". For him, nothing had changed since the researchers came, but he did like them. "They did not have any impacts, not good but also not bad". Seu Joao had had a similar reaction "Well it really depends on them, if they will benefit us in any way. But either way, they are welcome".

Isabella and her daughter Daniella were also less positive about the UFBA team. After the sports training for women that was led by Daniella she invited me for coconut in front of their house. As soon as we sat in front of her house with her mother Isabella, she changed into a way more friendly and less authoritarian person I had just experienced at the training. With a red-colored head I started the conversation about the UFBA. They both kept quiet for a bit, but as I stayed quiet as well, they started to portray their thoughts on the UFBA. "Can I be honest? They don't get anything done here" Isabella said while looking straight in front of her. "I mean what have you seen? What have they done for us?" asked without expecting an answer. Daniella added

"They come and talk very beautifully, but in practice they get nothing done. I have not been even contacted by them. Why? Because I am not a fisher or seafood gatherer? But I live here as well."

Isabelle took over on the conversation again "I mean, not to be negative about you and all you know...but they talk and talk and talk but nothing gets done. So many researchers have come here, from different Universities, but I have barely seen anything left for us here." For the first time she turned to me and looked me in the eye "I mean I know you guys have good intentions and all...but Siribinha is not going to change". "We, ourselves, will not change" Daniella added again to her mother's argument "and so they try and they try, but they get nothing done in the end.

Other fishers in Siribinha were only negative about the project and the work that the researchers had done over the years. Many of them had been interviewed various times by different researchers starting from Jose, they were asked to answer questions about birds, fish and their fishing techniques. Only by passing by their houses I could feel some distance and I felt distrustful eyes keeping a close eye on my footsteps. Next time I saw one of these fishermen sitting alone I went up to him, took a chair and sat down without saying anything. Ramon was drinking a beer in the late afternoon and kept looking into the deep as I sat down close to him. Some minutes of silence were enjoyed and then he said "so you play baba (football) uh?". I couldn't help laughing a bit "yes, but did you see my epic fail? That last goal was totally my fault, I messed up". He laughed, "it was pretty funny yes, but for a woman you are not so bad". I wanted to say many other things in relation to that but kept quiet. I asked if he had seen a lot of researchers in the last years. "Yes, yes, they do not stop!". I asked him to elaborate what he meant by that. "it is really too much, they come and ask the same questions all the time, again and again". "Are you part of the university?" he asked, before rambling on. I have to confess I panicked for a moment, "...Ahh...well yes, and no". I explained that I was taking part in the project as someone of the team but that I was researching its relationship and ways of participating with the community as a whole. He told me that in that case my job was very important, because he felt very wrongly treated. Ramon had no idea what was going to happen with the information he gave, he also said he doesn't know why they want that information. "I am not the only one who thinks like this, many people here think that way. Even when they don't say it out loud!"

William, the brother of Marcos who had been very positive toward the UFBA, was one of those "They only organize those workshop where they do things that are not relevant for us (collectively cleaning rivers and beaches from plastic)." He told me he had been to those meetings at least two times, but found it was really not relevant for him at all and would not bring anything good for him. He thought that they could do more actions than just talking if they wanted to have an impact. "I perceive that the people from the university are quite preoccupied with the survival of species, and the quantities of species, to take them off of the endangered list." Ramon had also stated

"I'm sure they are getting a benefit from all of this, and what do we get?"

Ramon was really distrustful of the researchers from the UFBA. The same distrust was shown by William "they come here with that professor and the people from the municipality, they talk about doing a lot of stuff, but until now nothing has become a reality". Daniel had mentioned this latter aspect as well, explaining that the work of the researchers here could facilitate the government in doing so, and that is the main reason the work of the researchers is seen as a threat. Still he also acknowledged

"when the researchers come here and you look into their eyes, you can really see that they care about, us, fishers. Especially those that live together with us, that go out to fish with us, that live throughout difficulties even if it is just for a bit. I feel like they are worried about the fishers here. But outside of here it is not like that".

"In the end" Daniel said concluding "I think it is the aim of the researchers to bring a benefit for the community for tomorrow (meaning in the future), but for us that live here now we don't see that happening. We even think that its influence might be negative".

A big discrepancy existed between the community's perspective of what the UFBA was doing and what the benefits for the community was, and the researchers perspective. Different benefits were brought to the fore in my months of engagement with the community. Besides the knowledge sharing and valorization of local knowledge, no benefit was named in common. Interestingly, some of the community members that had (or had had) close ties to some of the researchers, did like the presence of the researchers even if they see no benefit for themselves or the community, for some ia benefit

was not important. Most of the community members with least contact, were quite negative about the presence of the UFBA in the community. Yet, others saw no benefit in the work of the UFBA even if they had participated in the various activities. A common feature showed to be that those with more close contact with the community, had a positive attitude toward the researchers.

As Reason & Bradbury (2006) argue, because these interactions inherit disbalances of power between universities and communities, control of the research process should be within the community, making it more likely that research will actually benefit the community. In order to create the right context for research to be fruitful for those communities participating in it, community members should not only know what the research is about, and see an interest in it, they should be able to direct and mold the research towards a kind of research that they know will be of use to them (Bacon et al., 2005; Schinke & Blodgett, 2016; Wallerstein et al., 2020). Many of these scholars working on PAR and decolonizing methodologies claim that when led by researchers aims and goals, in such research context benefits become merely secondary to the research ambitions (de Sousa Santos, 2009; Smith et al., 2010; Stanton, 2014; Tuhiwai, 1999), hindering communities to trust on the good intentions of research projects and demotivating engagement with research in these contexts (Brayboy et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2010; Stanton, 2014; Tuhiwai, 1999). Looking at the degree to which the community understood the aims and goals of the research and the amount of control they had over the research directions, it is not striking that no particular interest was shown by some community members to 'participate' in UFBA activities.

5.1.3 OWNERSHIP OF THE RESEARCH

The community did not see research as something common, and sometimes not even as something they participated in. Seu Igor, one of the older fishermen said "I participate indeed in their research because I answer the questions. At least when I know the answer I give the answer if I don't know I don't know". Some agreed with Seu Igor; the overall view was that the research was not theirs, and it had nothing else to do with them other than having to respond to questions. Daniel answered similarly during the evenings we hung out. In one of those conversations I asked how he felt when researchers come and talk to him. He fessed up "Hm... I think in reality, when I share my experiences, what I have lived, and my knowledge about how it was and how it is today, it is really for them." I asked him to elaborate "you know what I think Esther, we have had many researchers before this group. We had people from Sergipe, Sertao, Salvador and in the end, it is good for them. They learn about research etc. The only true benefited are they themselves. But for me, it doesn't matter. If I can help them, I will."

Although the UFBA team tried to bring attention and focus on what they could do for the community to benefit the community this process seemed driven mostly if not solely by the UFBA team, with exception of some participatory meetings in the schools early on in the project. It came to me that although with different conceptualization, many practitioners and scholars working on more decolonizing methodologies for this kind of research context have addressed the issue of agency of the community in this first stage. Bacon et al., (2005), Stanton (2014), and Reason & Bradbury (2006) addressed the importance of the initial stage of research, and how vital it is to treat research as something common from the very beginning. Authentic participation only exists when the community itself is the initiator of the project, or at the minimum is part of the guiding the initial steps of the research (Stanton, 2014) and collaborative gathering and analysis of data is done (Wallerstein et al., 2020; Tuhiwai, 1999).

Of all the community members I spoke to and engaged with, only two somewhat saw themselves as drivers of some of the actions the UFBA team engaged with, and these were solely in respect to the participatory workshops. Most community members, either those more positive towards the research as those more distrustful and skeptical about the work of the UFBA in Siribinha, saw it as a project of

the UFBA in which they we're invited to a greater or lesser extent to participate. "Their work is with fishes and birds" would many older fisherman state "their research is good for them" Carlos has made clear. "They are not here to help us" William told me. And those very positive about the researchers still saw it as something the UFBA team was doing for them and for conservation of the "they are trying to do good for the community, their project is to preserve this place and that is good for all of us, even if some people don't get it. Some people are just stupid". In none of these expressions however show a sense of ownership or driving force of the research. Except for Jessy, Carlos and Barbara to some extent, the project did not seem to be of their own, or even shared. The closest I've come to hearing this was when the topic of knowledge and knowledge integration would be crossed. Here some community members would state that they would work together with the UFBA team, and share knowledge about bird and fish species to learn from each other. Even though this knowledge valorization and integration can be key for meaningful participation, it does not cover for the lack of agency that is appointed to the community to drive goals and ambitions of research itself.

Collaboration can take many shapes, from a more tokenistic involvement, cherry-picking in the extent of participation and more fully integrated co-research collaborations. Stanton warns that often projects tend to be actually more superficial in their participation even when true collaboration is claimed, because each research is driven to conclude in publication and institutional recognition (Stanton, 2014). Cahill (2007) adds to that, stating that the community themselves obviously hold the deepest knowledge about their own experiences, knowing best how a research must be directed to create a benefitting experience. Thus, it is essential in a participatory research project that they lead, or at the least, help shape the questions and frame the interpretations' of research (Cahill, 2007).

These issues resonate very much with the project in Siribinha. If not Lucas and Jose had started to engage with the community members of Siribinha, having a relatively privileged position that enabled them to flirt with the idea of a participatory project of knowledge integration in the primary schools of Siribinha, the projects would have potentially not emerged at all. Yet, as laid out above, Lucas's story of how they very carefully and respectfully searched for participation in the community gave me the impression that participation and collaboration was pursued from the initial stage. So in what respect does this initial process differ from what these scholars are pointing out? I found these answers located in the amount of agency the community had and has, to direct and shape the research. Even if participation with the community (in a more superficial sense) was the initial aim, and benefits for the community became a more prominent issue as the project evolved, the community was not seen or invited to shape the project as whole, driving research questions, aims, action and methodologies from the beginning, and for many sub projects that followed neither after the initial stage.

Worries about shifting the power of the research to the community itself, and giving ownership (at least to some extent) of the research to the community is something I felt was very limitedly present. No researchers mentioned this distinctively, not even in the famous and infamous mantra of Lucas I had heard in the first few weeks. Although he had talked a lot about benefits, and even empowerment of the community in the long run, this 'empowerment' had no primary space within the research process itself.

Only Mariana had been very explicit about this issue. As a professor in politics, she repeatedly acknowledges the importance of (a sense of) agency over the participatory actions. "It is important that the community themselves take power over the project" she said, referring to the participatory workshops on conservation. In these meetings the main aim was to be determined by the community and Mariana had given a lot of attention to this issue. Mariana explained

“actually in these participatory processes the most important thing is to make them understand the action should not be instigated or motivated by us, because we are not going to do that action with them.”

She went on reinforcing this latter aspect “they have to decide what they should do, because only they will undertake those actions; we will not do it with them”, Mariana stated determinately. When I asked her why that was so important, she explained otherwise community action would depend on the University and that would create a toxic kind of relationship between the UFBA team and the rest “they have to do things for themselves, and not for us”. She repeated the crux of the participatory meetings stating that it was her hope that like in her other projects, the community would take appropriation of this technique and organize themselves for whatever they need and would use this technique to take collective action and be more autonomous. “It is important because these communities have been marginalized and often neglected in the creation of public policy. Being organized and able to take action as a community could help them to demand certain rights they have, or demand to be taken seriously and into account when creating public policy.” She said it is important for a community to have associations, and leaders in a community that are able to organize the community.

Unfortunately, except for two or three community members nobody saw the work of the UFBA as a shared endeavor. Besides, the work of Mariana and Fernanda, in Siribinha other sub-projects have been motivated from academic pursuits more than from the community. Even if active participation was pursued in some subproject they were less so from the start, and for some projects they were only participatory in having the community be respondents of questions. Ana introspected on this last issue in my latest talk with her

“to be honest Esther, even if I know I have a very effective and trustful relation with the community and we are really working together, there is still a lot about participation that I did not do myself. I wish the whole process of choosing and shaping my research had started from the base, with the community, and not from my own interest”.

Although I got the idea that the extent of participation in the beginning of the project was rather scattered and slightly cherry picked, the need to create more participatory ways of doing research and bringing benefit to the community however gained prominence as the project developed. Reaffirming Reason & Bradbury's (2006) warning, it can be difficult to alter and relocate power and agency away from these researchers when they enter the community with an idea in mind of what a good research theme is.

When I asked Lucas about who drives these projects he was clear “Ideally we would establish an eco-museum together with the community, the municipality and the university. This would generate new income for great part of the community and of course, in an ideal world, this would also help conservation of the estuary. We would be able to create a private conservation unit with the university to conserve the periquito¹³.” he said while taking a sip of his coffee. “I hope we keep the communication we have with the community now will stay which I feel is very good (...) but the real challenge is still to come with the implementation of some of the conservation units and the establishment of the eco-museum. The idea would be that they would be managers of their own museum”. The idea of the eco-museum had come from one of the teachers of the school in Siribinha during one of the first meetings. When I asked him why it was important to go on with this project regardless of the challenges he however showed a similar drive to that of Mariana referring to the autonomy of the community: “It would be very cool if it would work, because I think it could be a reference for the rest of the country. And especially in these difficult political times (Bolsonaro) it is

¹³ Refers to a Bahian' parrot close to extinction in this region of Bahia, Brazil

important to show how conservation can be done in a non-essentialist, bottom-up way together with the local community (...) in that sense, it is political resistance as well". This is really what motivates him "and the best would be, if they are part of our project as colleagues, as 'parceiros'(comrades) to establish an eco-museum that could help them have more self-determination in their own lives." This some sense of wanting to give autonomy to the community was present, yet somehow, this was not translated into letting the community determine the directions the different investigations should go, or most importantly, they were not taken as different but equal partners for doing so.

Interestingly, Lucas ideally wanted to have the community as colleagues. Yet, in order to become true and equal collaborators, both the community itself and the academic researchers need to acknowledge the community as being capable of being so. While it is easy, in theory, to agree upon the conception that a local community ought to be (and can be) the driver of its own research, friction exists and often arises when the skills, drenched in values and beliefs of academic scholars emerge (Schinke & Blodgett, 2016). This can be either as a result of initial insecurities by the community members, the challenges of academic scholars to abandon their place as a research expert, unintentional or not, or both (Schinke & Blodgett, 2016). As Muhammad et al., (2015, pp. 1049–1050) puts it

"Our ascribed or achieved identities may impact our capacities to share power, even with our ideals to collaboratively produce and disseminate knowledge for community benefit. The shared process of research, however, may set in motion bidirectional educational processes of empowerment and critical consciousness, which ultimately can shift the research conversation altogether"

Therefore, the issue is not to see the project as one 'helping' the community (Freire, 1970), nor one ignoring the community and subsuming their ways of lives, knowledge, and ways to attain their livelihoods (de Sousa Santos, 2015). It is rather seeing them as partners, different but equal partners in the research project, bringing different lived experiences, knowledges and interests to the foreground that actually can make science more meaningful in a particular context, and maybe even outside of it.

Because ownership of the research process was not in the hands of the community, many other issues that are essential for their aim to engage in more just, equitable and horizontal (more decolonial) forms of collaboration were hard to attain as well. Having an equitable design and implementation of the research, facilitates the possibility for more reciprocity throughout the whole research process (Stanton, 2014). In fact, to me it felt like little surprise that some community members might be less motivated to 'get involved' if they were not involved in the whole goal and motivation of such research in the first place.

Not taking agency as pivotal at the beginning might have had implications for the community's own beliefs in their abilities as well (Schinke & Blodgett, 2016). That is not to say that the UFBA team members did not want to include the community in this phase, that they are not well-intentioned or that they did not aim to ultimately make the community agents of the research if they knew how. Yet, after some months among the UFBA team I felt that the 'how' is only represented in abstract and conceptual theories, and less so (and less spoken about) in methodological approaches, relationships, practices and actions with the community on the ground. Although in theory the -how- to relate to the community is a topic for discussion within the UFBA team, and this issue has been taken seriously in Lucas's own theoretical endeavors (going on a sabbatical to work with Boaventura de Sousa Santos, a well-known thinker in critical and more political stances on knowledge and science) and it is touched upon in his mantra, it is lacking thorough translation on the ground. As a result, in many of the subprojects that the UFBA team engages in, community members are seen as solely kept informants that own knowledge that is local and practical and as much worth as academic knowledge, but are

they themselves, their capacity for reflection, and their capabilities of fully grasping their interest and motivations in research, not really taken seriously.

Besides this issue being problematic in itself, it is important to highlight not only the lack of agency in the initial stage is explanatory for the lack of participation. It is rather the fact that there has been little motivation, and even less, action, to shift power afterwards and redirect research together with the community after this first stage (with the exception of the participatory meetings). Yet, along the way, more agency was gained by the community due to feedback from some of the researchers, including myself. Bit by bit steps were made to facilitate an increase of agency for the community. More than a year after I had been with the community in Siribinha, Lucas's own worries towards the issue of agency gained more prominence in his work in theory building, but also more focused on finding ways to share power in practice.

5.1.4 POSITIONALITY

Decolonial scholars and activists have communalities with many of these stances on participatory researchers, stating that researchers "own individual social identities and statuses, and the impact of these within the work of the PAR team, must be open to exploration" (Smith et al., 2010: 423). A more decolonial way of doing research consists of acknowledging the privileges of the western academy, not only in how it shapes what knowledge is constituted as such, but also what concerns are there to tackle with academic science and what issues are relevant for society. In order to be able to interrogate their positionality and taken-for-granted assumptions regarding privilege and marginality, researchers need to access the ways in which their lives may be considered privileged or marginalized through their identities (Bozalek, 2011). As PAR practitioners (Bacon et al., 2005; B. L. Hall & Tandon, 2017; Long et al., 2016; Minkler, 2004; Muhammad et al., 2015) remind us, this is best done in conversation with those from different social political locations. Often the opposite of positionality comes with a conflictual process of assimilation that denies difference. Interacting by assimilating these differences they tend to wash out power relations regarding difference as neutral and value free.

In order to not fall in the temptation of assimilation, you start off with positioning yourself as researchers and give prominence your privileges, identities, and social political locations in society in a way that leaves them up to be scrutinized by all the collaborators of the research, academic and non-academics included. Bacon et al., (2005) argue that "If researchers want to increase participation and move towards more collaborative and collegial relationships in a PAR process, they can start by making their personal history, identity, and interest in the work clear to the participants" (Bacon et al., 2005: 3). For example, Bacon et al (2005), described how in his participatory action research with farmers he went about doing this in the community he wanted to work with, after meeting the community a couple of times. "A first step in the PAR process was to explain to the farmers how I was going to benefit from this research (i.e., getting a Ph.D. and furthering my career goals). The cooperative members responded positively to this discussion, mentioning that it was perhaps the first time an external actor began by expressing his/her benefit from their work." He argues that in sharing one's own experience an understanding is fostered among everybody present, about how power, privilege, researcher identity and academic research team composition, and their effects on partnering processes can create a disparity of outcomes.

Sharing and scrutinizing positionality here did not mean writing a disclaimer on top of his research paper, but rather engaging in dialogues about it with the non-university collaborators. Bozalek (2011) argues that creating the chance for people to become both insiders and dedicated outsiders in their interactions across different experiences is key, and this can only be done if you bring people together to confront these differences (Bozalek, 2011). This is what Bozalek (2011) argues that positionality in research is really about. The most well spread idea of positionality in research draws from critical

feminist studies and critical race studies such as (Crenshaw, 1991; England, 1994; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2015; Rose, 1997). I see positionality as the act of positioning and locating researchers in relation to the social and political context of the study—the community, the organization or the participant group and therefore, positionality refers to a se in motion, a set of processes, rather than different characters themselves. I see it as an attitude, an extent of reflexivity that comprises who we are as researchers, how we see the world and what our lived experiences are.

"In order to overcome these problematic conceptions of oversimplified essentialised constructions of fixed positions of oppression, the notion of positionality alerts us to the idea that we all occupy positions of privilege and disadvantage depending on the context in which we find ourselves. Nobody is immune from dominant hegemonic discourses and in order to become aware of these, one needs some form of mediation – whether from engagement with more knowledgeable peers, or critical texts or encounters across difference, which would serve to provide a stimulus to become critically reflexive about taken-for-granted assumptions and oppressive practices."(Bozalek, 2011, p. 473)

At the same time, positionality reflects the possibility of pondering and wondering about its implication for your decisions, actions, attitudes, and approaches to research and methodology (Tuhiwai, 1999). It is the paradigm you talk from. Where your eyes are positioned (Haraway, 1988).

Smith et al., (2010) puts this issue in the context of university-community interactions. Preconceptions, biases, and misgivings of university students who often come from relatively privileged social class backgrounds can be brought to light by this kind of engaged reflection. Reflecting on this reality can be very difficult, and yet extremely helpful for establishing a more collective reflexive process in, and of, research. It does not ensure, however, for researchers to not fall into "unintentionally patronizing attitudes that can lie beneath the charitable intentions of academics (or other would-be helpers from dominant social locations)" (Smith et al., 2010, p. 411). An anecdote of Smith et al.,'s (2010, p. 411) experience in a PAR process which she engaged in with some of her students stuck with me a lot as exemplifying how difficult it can be to see the community-researchers as equal.

"a graduate student and a White gay male, wrote in his field notes: At the first PAR meeting that included our new participants, one of the team members asked if I would share with everyone who I was and why I was there. It was a question I had asked myself and answered in my journal entries and within the university PAR team many times over. However, in the moment that I was asked to participate in that same discussion with participants, I was struck with an anxiety-provoking realization. It was easy to say to my colleagues at school that I wanted to help and advocate for queer youth in our city. However, to say 'I want to help you' to a group of people who were actually more comfortable with their queer sexuality than I was seemed incredibly presumptuous. Immediately I realized that I was still not viewing the organization's members as equal partners in the project".

It might be difficult to unveil how certain location affect our life, how we place ourselves in it, and how it relates to others, because we are ourselves deep-seated in these locations. As Bozalek (2011) states "Consciousness of privileges is often obscured and naturalized as part of normative expectations of everyday living". This is especially true for the intersectional understanding of privilege (Muhammad et al., 2015), that understand how gender, social political location and race are all intertwined and that therefore these positionalities are complex. The point made by Bozalek (2011) as well as Smith et al (2010) is exactly that it is essential to not be afraid to voice that confusion and discomfort.

Locations of privilege of the UFBA team

Having wandered between the UFBA-meetings, grabbing lunches and hanging out in the lab, between music concerts, samba parties, and street theatre shows, with the different researchers within the UFBA, and having created (more and less) close relationships I found some had reflected very much upon their social and political mobility in society and the privileged position they had. Yet, these did never come up in conversations with each other but rather with me individually and in informal ways. Very often I would start with a conversation about privilege, and the privilege I had as a European student and the back-up safety net that I was used to, the privilege of being able to take risks, and many more things. As is inherent to my (too) open personality, I shared many of these (new) mental threats with my friends there,; with my friends inside the community of Siribinha, as well as my friends within the UFBA team. With this engagement, I listened, learned and opened myself up to empathize with other experiences of the same. I learned that many of the UFBA team members did have similar (and obviously very different) thoughts wandering around in their heads in relation to privilege.

One member told me "I come from a quite humble family and was raised in a 'barrio popular'(popular neighborhood) (...) Although my experience of being marginalized is different from that of some people in Siribinha, for example because I am white, I can relate to some of the struggles they go through because of being left by my governments etc". Another researcher made similar reflections upon who they were and how that related to the people in Siribinha "I think it is important for the community so see we are not all white researchers, in that respect I feel I can relate to them, having similar afro-descendent traces and a culture that is not from the fast city, but more relaxed and true to some extent, you know what I mean Esther?". I said I felt I did understand, within of course, my limited capacity. Another team member made another relational comment to Siribinha's community. "You know where I grew up, I always felt like an outsider. Like I did not fit, and I did not belong there. These communities have been negated, maybe that is why I feel connected to them".

Lucas appeared to be well aware of the baggage he brought as 'professor', he told me he had stayed away from some participatory meeting because (among other reasons) he became aware that his position as 'Professor' of a university had a status that exerted some kind of power over the room. He said there is not really something to do against the fact that the community sees him as a professor and therefore puts him in a certain higher social hierarchy than other researchers or the community themselves. " My position here is also reinforced by all the students because they come and say, 'I am supervised by Lucas' ", he explained. He acknowledged that because of his personality and position as professor, he had to step down from participating in some of the participatory actions. Others made less reference to Siribinha but made clear in other ways they very well understood they had a privileged position in the Salvadorean society as a whole and within the academic area. "I have no idea how I could have gotten to university if my parents hadn't paid for a good secondary school. Although I feel I did not catch up too much from it, haha, how was I supposed to learn English if it wasn't for my parents sending me to do a private course? Many secondary schools have a terrible level. Even if my school was pretty okay, without those English classes I wouldn't have had the possibility to do a PhD".

I remember Mariana telling me "I know as a researcher they might look up to you or start talking along with what you say, that is why I try to be as much on the background as possible". This shows how much she was aware of her position and what she brought with her, at least for others, going to the community. She had come to the conclusion that not talking about it and staying in the background was a better way of dealing with such power imbalances. It left me wondering, could it be that leaving yourself out and trying to stay in the background would really navigate those different social and political locations? By acting as if you are not there (in a way), are you less present? Is your baggage less present? These questions left me wondering about the PAR theory I had read.

I found privileges and positionality not to be central in UFBA teams approach of collaboration with the community. Yet, even if mingling with the UFBA team members I reckoned some were aware of their positionality and what baggage they brought to the fore in doing research up to a degree, but if so, this was not acknowledged towards each other as colleagues not in their communication with the community. I felt that this tension was awkwardly silenced. As if, if you don't mention it, it doesn't exist, or it will dilute. Some indirect acknowledgements to privileges and positions were made but in a hazy manner, and mostly in regard to the privilege of academic knowledge over local traditional knowledge. This being the least personal and awkward privilege to acknowledge, one that can be looked at as a grand societal issue. Yet the researchers' own identity and position and socio-political location stayed as a misty mirage, that would make vision and conversation with one another difficult, that would penetrate and impact each interaction but was -even with its blurring character- taken as normality.

Many of the practitioners and scholars that have racked their brains about how to decolonize methodologies and research in general have actually highlighted the importance of such painful conversations with one another (Bacon et al., 2005; Bozalek, 2011; Tuhiwai, 1999; Harding, 2015; Muhammad et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2010). This process of politicizing these different social political locations from which we deploy ourselves into research can therefore be crucial. It felt like a lost opportunity to me because I felt that, if made more open for scrutiny, these issues could have brought the opportunity for healing and bolster trust, participation and understanding within the group. In a space where one tries to get to know the other and can reflect and feel empathy even if it is not what you have been through yourself, you are able to confront these differences and engage with them (Bozalek, 2011). As Muhammad et al. (2015, p. 1054) quote about the lead authors' own reflection "... I think that's the beauty of CBPR (Community Based Participatory Research). It allows the researcher to use their internal strengths and assets as part of the research and not necessarily have to set your biases aside, but just be aware of your biases"

At some moment I remembered Ana stating that 'the uncomfortable spaces of friction with the community is fertile soil for true collaboration'. As Hall & Tandon (2017) pointily argue "the very practice of listening and understanding our differences is decolonizing the institutions that have long been closed"(Hall & Tandon, 2017, p. 17). It is decolonizing because engaging in these collective reflexive practices can strengthen internal power-sharing and capacity (Wallerstein et al., 2020). This approach to participatory research can get very well married with the 'problem posing approach' that Freire (1970) conceptualizes in which the researchers are engaged in a process of critical questioning. This questioning is about issues that are important to the communities and to the researchers themselves, and forces them to be critical of each other's perspectives. Freire's writings have contributed to the notion that emancipation of this kind of interaction between university and community can occur when oppressor and the oppressed come together to critically reflect on reality.

This was, however, done in Poças showing indeed a very different result, Ana told me one afternoon while hanging around the UFBA together. In Poças Ana and Camilla told me to have close, trustful, and affective relationships, still after working there for years. "When we started to make contact with the teachers there and we gathered other community members to discuss possibilities for collaboration they all looked at us with suspicion and weariness". She started naturally imitating what those untrustful faces looked like at the moment and came into the role of one of the teachers.

"they said 'why do you want to work with us? Why? Eeh?' We explained what our motivations were and how we wanted to make sure local knowledge was very much valued in schools as well. The teacher said 'But why here? What do you gain form this? What is behind it? They really were skeptical at the beginning and it took time, and living together, getting to know who we were as people and sharing experiences, for them to trust in our

true motivations for the project. But now, it is going so well in Poças and Siribinha got stuck a bit in that respect”.

I asked her what the difference was with Siribinha “Well, nobody in Siribinha asked anything about us, they kind of seem to accept us immediately. But after some time, I think maybe they did not feel really engaged and some issues with trust came along. That is my opinion”. It seemed indeed silence about true interest, motivations, could do more harm than good. But what if these conversations are not provoked by the community itself as in Siribinha? What if positionality and privileges that align with certain benefits are not discussed? I intently remembered the first sentence Seu Bernardo spoke after I explained what my research was about was “well I can tell you, I believe that we do more for them than they do for us”, and Joao’s skeptical comment “If I feel they care about us? hahaha they care way more about their work than us!”.

In Siribinha, these topics seemed not to be discussed to avoid problems, conflicts, and tensions. The issue of respecting local knowledge, and understanding the power dynamics they brought from the academy is something that was much easier discussed. Not only, because Lucas’ talked about it and reassured to impress this in the minds of the researchers during almost every meeting, but also because it is less personal. Somehow attaining to these conceptual ideas of plural worlds was easier than thinking about one’s position and privilege in relations to the community. If this was already not discussed within the UFBA team, as I will elaborate in the next sub-chapter, let alone that there was an intention of driving these conversation and reflexive cycles with the community. Yet, these awkward conversations could have been fertile soil for forging trust as the case in Poças ças shows.

5.1.5 GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER VS BEING UNPAIRED FROM A DISTANCE

Sensitive topics

I found overall that the UFBA team members were encouraged to stay as neutral as possible to everything that might be a conflictuous topic. Lucas had made this comment to ensure students would not come into the community advertising their political preference or any strong statements that could make the community of Siribinha uncomfortable. While explaining this issue in the gray strip-lighted lab of the Biology Institute, he made specific reference not to worsen the conflict many community members had with the local municipality and the secretary of the environment. He was sitting in his chair in front of the square table with other lab members around him, communicating this issue with a grain of humor as was not uncommon to him,

“We need to be aware of not politically positioning ourselves. Not just by not talking about politics but by being aware of what clothes we wear as well. You might not start a political discussion, but if you enter the community with a big t-shirt with free Lula it doesn’t make any sense haha”

He said with twinkling eyes and a smile on his face that slowly turned into a reddish color, lightly making fun of whoever would do something like that. Not purposefully trying to invoke conflict or make community members uncomfortable seemed logical to me, and I understood the importance for Lucas to restate that. But what did that really say about how to interact with the community in practice? Was he stating that we as researchers should try to ignore our own presence in the community and the social and political location we come from? To what extent could we then interact? Is it problematic when this ‘getting to know each other’ entails dialoguing about different religious backgrounds? I wanted to respect what Lucas had said in the UFBA team meeting but I also felt it was very unnatural for me to try and create a genuine connection without somehow showing my own ideals. If I had difficulty making a clear divide between what was sharing too much about your stances in life and what was getting close to the community, maybe other researchers felt the same? I knew Lucas meant to use ‘common sense’ about not provoking conflict, as he had said repeatedly. Yet, the

fact that this was seen as such 'common sense', the joke about it, and my own doubtfulness in respect to that matter altogether got me uneasy. Maybe this was again a rather silenced topic because it was taken as obvious (or natural), just like the positionality and privilege issue? Regarding this issue, the very different stances within the UFBA team are what most captivated me, as I will further explain.

Having to choose between two virtues

After my talk with Mariana I started to get a grip on yet another tension that seemed even more complex than the issue about positionality, ownership, and the sharing of research goals and ambitions. Beyond dealing with the positionality and the social-political location you research from, there seemed to be a tension between the aim to not get too personal, or be too open about individual ideals, political or religious stances not to give space for conflict about sensitive topics, to stay objective and to make sure we don't hamper the community to take ownership of the process, and on the other side getting close with the community and creating a reciprocal relationship of affection.

Mariana had made it clear that one has to be careful not to make any unnecessary comments. When I asked what those comments were, she answered "stances on politics, or religion for example (...) we do not talk about politics. We listen to the struggles and complaints toward for example the secretary of environment but will not give our own opinion or say anything about it. It is important not to get involved in those conflicts and not motivate more complaints". I felt a bit like playing devil's advocate and asked why not. She looked a bit confused for a split second and answered "we cannot construct together that way".

From what I understood from Fernanda and Mariana, the premise of such -facilitator only- role is that a researcher should stay separate from the action, so the community takes ownership of the process and becomes empowered. On the one hand, Mariana claimed 'knowing the other' to be important but on the other hand it seems like professional distance is seen as something good as well. At the end of the interview, Mariana affirmed not sharing personal information with the community and not asking for any. "I formally present myself as a researcher". She stated she never gets personal. Why would you not ask personal or private things? I asked her.

" Well, I just don't see the use of it". "Our presence there is more of a mediator, because we don't live there. Sometimes researchers really live at the place, for example anthropologists. But we in political science don't need that, we are way more objective".

She went on explaining, "it is more important for us to understand the social and political dynamics. For example, understanding power dynamics in the community". To me, it felt as a discrepancy. With very good intentions for the community, and her experience working with other communities, she had learned the importance of taking the role of mere facilitator of community action. "The communities need to be in charge of any process of change, otherwise they will not do it (...) they have to themselves have to decide when, what and for who of the future" she said calmly. This aim very much resonates with the prementioned aim of PAR practitioners of having the community members as owners of the research process, making it seem as an important part of translating more decolonial forms of research and methodologies in practice (Tuhiwai, 1999; Morton Ninomiya & Pollock, 2017; Stanton, 2014). So, how could I disagree with this? But was getting close to the community, and showing yourself as much as you ask others to show themselves, really something that excluded the opportunity for the community to take ownership over their own actions? And was it problematic to speak about the fact that you don't go to church? Is it wrong to take a side, or empathize with their struggles with the municipality? And most of all, was not talking about these differences with the community a solution to deal with these issues, even if they play a latent but important role in molding our form of relationship?

Following the lessons from feminist methodological and epistemological approaches to science, a different practice is opted. One in which self-determination of the community does not stimulate detaching oneself from the spaces of research but rather explicitly positions oneself in it. As much as at first glance there seemed to be a tension between aims for decolonial processes of research (ownership, self-determination and agency) and decolonial relationships in research (personal, caring, reciprocal) to me it seemed in practice there was still a lot of space and nuance between the two. Spaces in between where no distance or impairedness is needed to drive agency of the community.

From a feminist perspective, the search for value-free objectivity in the relationships that develop around such collaboration risks negatively impacting the relationships at hand (Crasnow, 2013; Harding, 2015), one should dare to enter these subjective spaces and engage with them. Have the disposition to get to know the other, comes with letting to get to know you. The risk of what that engagement might provoke is inherent in collaborations but should be embraced. Again, in line with these reinforcing colonial structures are not merely constituted by the power inequities themselves, but in fact, the negation to acknowledge, expose, and examine that difference (Smith et al., 2010). It is precisely, making relations between community and researchers more personal, more affective, more intense (McNamee, 2010) rather than 'staying out' or being impartial, that foment more reciprocal relations many these scholars and practitioners argue (Brayboy et al., 2012; Gerlach, 2018; B. L. Hall & Tandon, 2017; Tuhiwai, 1999; Reason & Bradbury, 2006), and can facilitate developing affective and thus more horizontal relationships across the participatory process (Muhammad et al., 2015; Wallerstein et al., 2020). Thus, not by silencing the power dynamics that are weaved into these relations, but by exposing them and trying to relate in new and affective ways with the community.

Letting others know you

This way of dealing with research reflected Gustavo's, Ana's, Camilla's and Bruna's visions on science as well, as they saw getting close, personal and affective with the community as a precondition for truly furthering the project. "It is impossible not to show who you are and your ideals to some extent" Gustavo argued.

"I think moments of tension are the key moments for building trust"

Ana explained the moment you start to speak about personal things, you break through something. I for example was with a fisher, he started to share stories about spiritual moments he had had in the past, another woman next to him as well, what am I supposed to do? Not share? You turn into another member of the community sharing your experiences. You don't need to be attacking or say all of it (for example with controversial stuff) but sharing connects as well. For example, Bruna brought her children to the village last time, how can you act as if it is not personal, it is personal! If it isn't personal it becomes empty as well" Ana said with a heavy voice, and continued,

"Human relationships and social interaction need subjectivity. Besides, otherwise it would be very unfair. Tell me everything about you, but I will not share anything".

For these researchers, immersion and a truly affective relationship with the community was a priority over gathering data or further evolving the research aim. More than anyone Camilla explained very thoroughly why having a close and trustworthy relationship is essential for participatory research. She argued that it takes a while before someone trusts you enough to give hers or his opinion about anything, especially in smaller communities. "even more if you want their honest feedback on the research process and direction itself. It is something I understand very well because I am quite shy myself, until I get to know someone". If the UFBA team wants the community to give true feedback on what they think about the project, and how they envision that the projects can help further facilitate the kind of development they want in their community, the relationship should be well established she

argued. "This doesn't go overnight, and might difficultly come to existence at all with 'visits' of a week with other 16 researchers" Camilla explained.

"The community needs to get to know you, your motivation, ambitions, and interests with the project as well (...) it is not mandatory for them to know the whole life story of Esther (using me as an example), you don't need to know everything about Esther and who Esther has romantic relationships with or not. But they do really need to have lived with you, shared that experience with you".

I had not heard this so clearly from any other researchers except for Ana, but it was exactly what I felt I had witnessed and experienced myself in the community. The point seemed to me that if by doing research you are intervening in a dynamic with so many unwritten rules, practices and even tensions, the researcher should take its responsibility to make sure where to step and where not. She continued,

"Only a close relationship, trust, can overcome those miscommunications. There are people that really don't understand that (...) they think, they do quantitative research and therefore they do not need to have relationship or close bond, but they should! Otherwise it becomes really a researcher using the community and their traditional knowledge to bolster his or her own academic career"

"We are not researching DNA transplanted in plants, we are working with people, they are from flesh and blood" another researcher had told me annoyed.

Apart from seeing that immersion is a prerequisite for a relationship of trust and empathy, Gustavo, Camila and Ana strongly evoked that this issue should be taken separate from the question of doing more qualitative or quantitative kind of research. Camilla stated,

"It doesn't really matter what kind of research you do, when it involves humans, it becomes personal"

For Ana it was clear that it didn't matter in what area you worked, or whether you did qualitative or quantitative research, the importance of immersion was the same. "Let's say I work with turtles" she exemplified "you still have to be there, immerse yourself in the community. The catching of turtles has ceasing periods in which they are not supposed to fish them, so there is a whole social-economical and even political structure around that which might be impacted". "Anything you state about turtles in your thesis in this case" Ana exemplified, "this could intervene very much in their lives without them even knowing." She went on in a low voice

"It seems some people of the team are unable to construct an affective relationship with the community members..... or maybe they just don't care...Unfortunately, I feel most of the team does not have those priorities."

What struck me most, was how much discussion and dialogues about these essential topics were lacking within the UFBA-team and the meeting they held. Many opinions and different visions existed about the extent to which one could and should be open and personal, that shaped great part of the different approaches to participatory engagements in research. From those who seemed somewhat oblivious to these issues as a whole, to those who had opposite ways and rationales for arguing how to best deal with them. Somehow it seemed deeper scrutiny of this issues and questioning each other's methods was waved away by Lucas' jokes about how obvious it was that as a researcher should be careful to position yourself in respect to sensitive topics. Yet, by just talking with the different researchers about it I found so many gray areas exist between being provocative and being open to the community. In that respect, avoiding being too suggestive in these participatory meetings is not what I argue is problematic, it is rather being unpersonal, formal, and distant from them as community members that I see most problematic.

My own PAR experience

My own interaction with and affection for the community had become closer as the weeks and months passed. I started to have my daily rituals together with the community. I would train every other day with the women trainings that were organized by Daniela at five o'clock. On Wednesdays and Fridays I would play soccer with the older men of the community. Every afternoon I would sit around with the different groups of women placed at the various shaded spots of the main road to break aratus. I went out fishing once in a while, and on the weekends I would join some to leisure in Casuerinho and eat – among other delights - a 'pastel' which is some kind of a deep-fried savory pastry with aratu and cheese. The evenings would fall short for me to sit around with everybody, for instance, I would spend some evenings sharing cheese with Julia, Daniel and their daughter Amanda, and other evenings I would spend in front of Fabio's house with his family, friends and neighbors that would stick around.

At the same time, the oil spill cleaning actions in Siribinha had started to very more evolve into a PAR process. Together we investigated how to best tackle the problem of the oil spills, organizing activities together. With a smaller group of most active members we started by agreeing we had to take these decisions collaboratively. I had made clear I had no idea about how to do this either, and that we would have to find out together during the way. Consequently, the PAR process was two folded.

One was the organization of the beach and mangroves cleaning days. With each our own task we organized getting everyone together, having food for the day, bringing equipment, and making it a bonding experience. For example Laura would have the best contact with Anderson, the municipalities' representative, and would persuade him to contribute with money for the gasoline of the boat or with money for food for lunch and Jessy was good at getting many of the other women together, she was great in divulgating online and inside the community. On the other hand, there was the crowdfunding campaign. I shared my doubt with the group with whom I had been cleaning the beach. "How should we bring this issue of the crowdfunding to the rest of the community? I think it is important that everybody decides what happens with the money since it is collected for the community as whole" I said. Nobody wanted to take responsibility for leading the meeting to my frustration "no you need to do it, Esther! You've started the crowdfunding, they will only listen to you" Jessy said. My stomach turned around, and the only reaction I could give was a disguised puff, in the form of a small grin.

There I was, a week later, as a white European student telling the community members that were present how much money we had collected with the crowdfunding and that this money was to be spent in a way that the community agreed with. I felt that before I realized what I was doing, I had already done it. Wasn't this the most paternalistic, colonial thing I could do? Coming to the community to 'help' them? It started to feel more and more agonized and distressed with the situation, but I was too far in it already.

As soon as I had opened the meeting, a chaos of voices, filled the room. People started pointing and shouting at each other, and others kept saying "quiet!" let her speak! It was getting out of hand, and I did not know what to do. Jessy, one of my best friends in the community, looked at my face, perplexed by noise and tumult. She shouted really hard for everyone to shut up. For a moment, silence arrived. I got myself together and got up from my chair. "let's sit altogether in this circle and talk one by one", I said. I asked Yasmin, to please take notes on the big paper we had put up. "Now one by one, or this is not going to work".

I was relieved when we came to an agreement and the meeting was over. Even if in the end everyone seemed happy, I felt something was wrong about about what had just happened. That night I received a notice from Carlos; he was done with participating in these meetings, he disliked the way the ambiance had been.

"As soon as money is in the game everybody just goes for their own interests, they started shouting and do not even listen to each other. I'm done with this".

He said he was not going to come anymore to the participatory meetings, he had enough, he said. That evening was extremely devastated and sad. I felt guilty of having brought the devil (money) inside the community with the crowdfunding campaign. Even if I meant so well, and help was needed in the community after the oil spills, my own engagement and interaction with the community had also resulted in this mess.

Anxiously I called and messaged with Lucas and Fernanda. "I screwed up!", I said almost crying. After I explained what had happened Lucas calmed me down. "You know, we did not anticipate the great effect and the danger of bringing money into the community. It was a risk, and we took it because we had good reasons too. And you know, this is a learning process, for you and for me". His sweet words calmed me down for a bit, and I went out for a walk. That evening I talked with many of the community members that had co-organized and participated in our beach and mangrove cleanings. I was sad, and I could not hide it. Many of these community members were a little frustrated as well, for the same reasons as Carlos. We talked for hours, and I openly stated why I was so unhappy.

"I feel that instead of getting the community together I have only further facilitated ripping you apart! And that is really the contrary of effect I wanted to have with this action. I really screwed up"

I said and had difficulty keeping my tears to myself.

In the following days seemed a turning point. Some people that participated actively in the cleanings started to work together with those whom they had stated to distrust and those who had never helped with the oil cleaning actions. They had been talking with one another, and decided to put many of their discomforts aside, and work together, "choosing to trust each other" Laura said. "we are all responsible" Jesse said with a serious tone. Even Barbara, Carlos's wife made sure that she would still be coming even if Carlos did not.

"You will see you did the good thing, my love. This community is always like this, but we can organize it together"

Clara said with a bit smile "stop looking stupid" Laura commanded "you will never get a real Baiano with that ugly face! And she knows she wants it!" she screamed laughing out loud. Everyone around me busted in laughter, myself included.

Besides giving a glimpse of how I engaged with the community and what our PAR (even if we did not name it as such) was all about, it showed that often these relationships, and the affect, and care that this brings along can create a kind of reciprocity (Smith et al., 2010). There is something that is animated when you share experiences, feelings, and care, that urges you to become more accountable to that (Gerlach, 2018; McNamee, 2010). In fact, it seems from that moment of friction we had become accountable to each other in new ways, and therefore our way of relating to each other had transformed as well (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). After hating myself for screwing up the collective actions with the community, and tearing people more apart than they already were, I was very touched by what Clara said with tears in her eyes at a goodbye surprise party the women had organized for me "I haven't seen so many of us women being together as one in such a long time, you have brought us together". I had greatly fucked up, I had made things more complicated by being so close to the community, I got into the frightening world of their internal conflicts and made them worse by my actions that meant to 'help' the community with my white and blond privileged appearance. Yet, the affective relationships and friendship I had with them made them empathize with

my hopelessness and sadness. It drove conversation that had not been held before, or at least motivated some of the women to 'get over' the distrust they felt towards others.

The unequal power relations were still there, my privilege and the baggage I brought to Siribinha had not vanished. But we had discussed it, and our care for each other made our relationship more interdependent despite these power differences (Stanton, 2014). It also showed how these relationships made the interaction as a whole more resilient to the different conflicts that can arise in the risky business of interacting with the community and collaborating with them in PAR (Smith et al., 2010). As I experienced myself in the community, by talking about my gains, motivations and privilege more clearly, the community could better relate to me, even if it meant understanding how different we were. Those that best got to know me, and became friends, were the ones that best mediated the conflicts and dilemma's that I had provoked myself, by bringing in crowd-funded money into Siribinha. It was the mutual affect, trust and care we had for each other that drove them to go and settle some of the conflicts that had arisen due to my presence. Because of these relationships, more horizontal forms of collaboration were possible.

5.1.6 DEALING WITH EPISTEMIC AND ONTOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE

In contrast to the aspects showed in the sections above, the UFBA team did very much address the aspect of difference, and how to deal with difference in the community. This aspect is way more discussed within the group and put into practice. As I already elaborated on difference in terms of positionality, the researcher's individual identity and the differences in power to drive and guide research, I refer here to difference in ontological and epistemological ways.

Lucas had talked about the issue of how to deal with difference in many meetings and other informal gatherings before the first fieldtrip I did with the UFBA team. Through the history of science, he exposed the argument that as much he believed in science, science cannot bring everything.

"If you are looking for spirituality, the divine, or an effective relationship with nature, science might not be very helpful while religion might actually be relevant".

He explained how sometimes in that respect it does not matter what is true and what is not, or who and what kind of knowledge can determine truth-ness. "for example, in a lot of fishing communities in the northeast of Brazil have indigenous traditions and beliefs. I myself was told the story of Caipora by fishermen who have fished in mangroves all their life". Even though Lucas had told the story several times, he still got shiny and joyful eyes when telling the story "If you do not respect the mangroves, or for example fish more than you should or need, Caipora will make sure you get lost in the mangroves. The fishermen who fished in these rivers respected the mangroves very much (...) Caipora naturally regulated the fish populations in the river". He explained that if people would want to conserve those mangroves, science might not ever become as efficient as Caipora is. He smiled widely.

"Displaying the amount of species in extinction that depend on mangrove is not probable to impress a fisher that has fished there all his life. Yet, Caipora and the myths around Caipora might be a way more effective way of stimulating conservation. Now it seems to me like the least relevant question to ask whether Caipora exists or not when you are worried about conservation. It is a way more interesting question to ask how Caipora influenced the behavior of Siribinha fishermen".

With this example, Lucas often tried to show his students how you could deal with difference and different ontological beliefs. As expected, Lucas could well articulate the pragmatism in this perspective. These examples and this attitude towards difference is what Lucas has tried to bring into the team as well. Always profoundly respecting local knowledge and traditional knowledge, no matter

how different from the knowledge system of academia. I remember how in one of his courses that I followed a couple of times named History and Philosophy of Science Applied to Ecology, he very eloquently would situate his own knowledge as a biologist and educational scholar within a world of many worlds. In class he reassured other forms of knowledge 'are not less worth than scientific knowledge. It really depends on what you are looking for, what you're aiming to research. Depending on that one kind of knowledge might be more valuable or useful for you than another one'.

One moment of my fieldwork stuck with me that showed the difficult ethical dilemmas that can occur in practice, even if the theory is neatly lined up and internalized as is the case with great parts of the UFBA team. Moreover, the UFBA team did discuss the issues of ontological and epistemological difference happened when it come to the contested issue around the oil spills and eating dona Luara's food. It forced the UFBA team as well as myself to talk and be reflective about our difficult position. We wondered if we would not dismiss their knowledge if we refuse to eat fish. We asked ourselves a lot of questions. What will they think about us? And will they think we have prejudices towards them if they themselves do eat it? Shall we tell them to stop eating? Who are we to do so? Not surprisingly Ana spoke out "are we really going to make a fuss about this? We buy veggies in the supermarkets full of agrotoxics and now we are scared to eat fish? Having the costs that they feel we are not solidary with them!?". No clear answers came to this question or the previous ones. Yet, talking about this issue showed that many researchers became aware of the uncomfortable ways in which 'difference' can play out on the ground, especially because everyone felt they could openly discuss the issues. For me, it became clear that when the issue was not too personal, the UFBA team could very well communicate, put their doubts on the table, and dialogue about difference.

Another way that difference and dealing with it was brought to the fore was that Lucas always made it very clear that we should not be openly judging the community, inspecting anything or give opinion openly about their behavior, even less in respect to the environment or ecological state of the area. "We are in no position to do so" Felipe said. He said he was told by Lucas even not to tell anything about the environment if the community did not ask for it. According to Felipe, the community still does not give too much value of their own knowledge. But he made clear he thinks it is very important to for example valorize the traditional names given to those animals.

"We cannot let the 'Crasto' turn into 'Marte Pescador', the traditional names of these animals belong to the community, and have a certain specific history. It tells something about their relationship with the community"

He explained. The bird they call the "little dog" for example, makes sounds that resemble a bit the barking of a dog. I remembered that Marcela told me "they know way more than we do, because I did not study. I did not have a chance to study back then. I can only write my own name". She explained that what researchers know is more important, that it has greater value. At the same time, she had gotten too emotional when explaining that others gave so much importance to her knowledge about plants.

Daniel proudly he told me that he had predicted the rain three days before it came because of a sign "what was it?" I asked very intrigued "a Urubu (a bird species), it was spreading it wings sitting on top of a tree. I told my nephew. He said I was crazy but then three days later it started raining like crazy". I asked if he felt the researchers respected that kind of knowledge:

"I don't know if they believe in it, but they respect haha, they respect...I don't think they believe most of it"

He explained that because a lot of them are students, they believe in science and therefore it is difficult for them to believe something else. With his head inclining to the right, he looked up to me with a little twinkle in his eye "But you know, nature is god, and god is nature".

Researchers seemed to be very cautious with the position of academic knowledge. While doing interviews, I have not seen any questioning of the information that was given by fishers in Siribinha. "I am really a rookie here, compared to them I do not know anything" Pedro said while he tried to explain how incredible wise the old fishers were he had interviews with. Looking at me with big eyes he went on

"Esther, you can't imagine how much I have learned while doing this research. I owe everything I know about fishes and birds to Sir Danilo. He taught me so much".

Yet, he seemed less aware of his own interference with the community and how some fishermen could start to distrust him if he would not share and show his goals and ambitions. Somehow even if he valued their local knowledge very much, it appeared he less so acknowledged their knowledge forming capacity in relation to the process of his research. Something I could sense in other UFBA team members' individual research endeavors as well.

In the end of my interview with Lucas, he elucidated that of course, we, as coming from the UFBA, always had some kind of imbalance in valorization.

"but I think it is more the social hierarchy of coming from a university than that the fact that they would really think we know more or are wiser than them".

This was reinforced to me one evening sitting with Bruno in front of his house

"you guys have more theoretical knowledge and that is good. But we, we have actual practical knowledge. It is real knowledge because we use it every day, we know it is real. Let's say, our knowledge is to some extent closer to reality than those theories that might be or might not be".

But some do not see their knowledge as important as the 'university' knowledge he acknowledged afterwards. "When we showed the film of Jose" Lucas explained "that is the only moment, I think, people really understood what we intended with valorization of their traditional knowledge and fishing arts."

The extent to which local knowledge was valorized and taken seriously, and the appreciation of epistemic strategies different than conventional scientific ones, has brought many positive results for the UFBA team as well as the community. In fact, as discussed in the general reflection of the community towards the project, having people intrigued in their knowledge made most of the community members that got close to UFBA team members feel very much admired and respected. The fact that this was so well integrated, despite the sometimes more superficial relationships, had brought great and positive results, as many community members had stated to feel valorized and respected by the UFBA team because their knowledge was respected. Some had even gained self-confidence about their abilities or had overcome their shyness to talk openly about it. To some extent it even made them valorize themselves more than they did before. These were truly wonderful dynamics to witness and those are key in doing participatory research.

Thus, on the one hand the UFBA team has been able to practice (to a less or greater extent) what they write about with regards to epistemology and ontology, in how to deal with different taxonomies and different knowledge systems and the limits of integration. Valorizing local knowledge and local epistemologies and ontological difference has been more closely theorized upon as much as it is shown in practice. For a research group operating from the Institute of Biology that has, as most biology institutes, mostly adhered to positivist traditions, and is lacking behind on integrating these epistemological and ontological issues in their curriculum, it is remarkable how much prominence and

respect is given to other ways of knowing and being in the world. The project seems to set small but important steps in developing a practical translation of what it means to do research without epistemicide, and what it means on the ground to take other ways of being serious.

Notwithstanding, even if different epistemic strategies were respected and this is a key element of more decolonial forms of collaboration, the promise of participation entails more than epistemological respect, and ontological plurality. Yes, indeed, community members in Siribinha's local knowledge, epistemologies, and ontological taxonomies were taken as very valuable, but somehow tore apart from the person that produced them. The personal capacity and skills to produce such knowledge somehow did still not qualify the community enough to be taken as serious in their capacity to drive research in ways that can benefit them. It seems that their epistemological strategies of learning-by-doing and knowing-by-doing were taken seriously only with respect to the ecological knowledge that it could produce, but not to valorize the human capacity behind it as a tool to drive research questions and research processes. To horizontalize forms of collaborations in university-community settings, means taking them seriously as agents and drivers of research as well (Gerlach, 2018; Schinke & Blodgett, 2016). It means, valorizing the community members as capable and skilled to engage in research, to reflect on the research they want, and to use it as a liberating practice (Freire, 1977) to regain grip on the transformations in their lives by acting upon it.

There is something the lack of agency of the community silently implies that seeps through as well, being, their self-recognition as people with competencies, skills and talent for being agents of such a research process. As Schinke & Blodgett (2016) explain mostly community members do not value themselves as equal in this process. Lucas had pointed out the social hierarchy of the university, and the status that comes along with it might have been the biggest driving factor for their own misappraisal of their capacities. But what was the UFBA team showing by not inviting them to be true equal partners in all the stages of research? Could this not be reinforcing the configurations of power of academia and rational science? As Hall & Smith, (2000) argue, it is not only about respecting other ways of being in the world, but also the ways local communities attain knowledge, and their capacities for doing research as their learning paths for liberation (Freire, 1970). If this more political side of research interactions is not addressed, dialogued and dealt with, the knowledge integration become less meaningful in the aim to decolonize ways to go about research.

As many scholars point out, benefits for the community become more natural and likely to develop when community themselves can take part in framing questions that drive such research (Buckler, 2013; J. Chevalier & Buckler, 2013; Tuhiwai, 1999; Long et al., 2016; Stanton, 2014). Ironically, the extent of benefits for the communities, seems to be obstructed by the very focus on knowledge integration without first passing through a more political aim of gaining agency in the research process itself. I felt the incapacity of many of the researchers within the UFBA team, and including myself, to see the community as actual equal partners, with equal values, was at the core of this problem. What I argue is problematic here, is not the fact that they did not completely realize the redistribution of power in each and every space, but it is rather the lack of attention and sensitivity to these aspects that might drive confusion and discomfort on the ground, but are exactly the most fertile ground for making a change, and changing the day-to-day practices in research.

Merely talking about the importance of benefits for the communities cannot fill in this void; neither does publishing a paper about how essential benefits for the community are, or how important participation is. Reflecting on some fishers in Siribinha, even if many felt respected and valued only by the questions directed to them, most members explained to feel more solidarity and respect from the researchers that had come along with them, that had stayed in the community for a more extended period, and whom they had gotten to know. Showing to be interested in not only their 'knowledge'

but also the person behind it and the daily practices in which they engaged, thus, appears crucial. Feeling valorized, feeling like they matter enough for others to want to get to know them. These close ties bring positive attitudes towards the researchers even when they see no benefit for themselves. Those researchers who expressed that benefits, motivations, and research interest were discussed initially seemed to have a stronger and more trustful relation with the neighboring community Poças. The fact that I was emotionally involved with the community and different members in it, and they felt the same way to some extent, created solidarity and motivation to work together. Talking about my gains, motivations and positionality more clearly, the community could better relate to me, even if it meant understanding how different we were. At the same time, it gave me the possibility of knowing some of the community members closely, making our collaboration and relationships more resilient when inevitable conflict and dilemmas that I had provoked myself arose by bringing in crowd-funded money into the community. The mutual affect, trust, and care we had for each other drove them to go and settle some of the conflicts that had arisen due to my presence.

5.1.7 MUTUAL LEARNING AND REFLECTION

As many PAR practitioners and other scholars with experience in university-community participatory research context prescribe, reflexivity cycles that drive mutual learning are an essential tool to engage in any participatory research, learn by doing, and critically evaluate how to do better. It consists of the individual researchers' reflexively learning capacity as the manager and leader of its own practice of research, on the one hand, and the capability of the research team or organization to critically reflect and learn from each other and understand how each functions in a wider system (McNamee, 2010). Because a leading professor in this case vastly directs the research team, I want to give special attention to the reflexive and learning cycles of the leading professor, Lucas in this case. These different modes of reflexive practice exist, unfold and intertwine over time (McNamee, 2010).

Thus, reflexivity is an indispensable phase to write, act, and live from a situated and positioned space. It is how one examines both oneself as a human being, as a researcher, and the research relationship within the project. Self-searching involves examining one's "conceptual baggage," one's assumptions and preconceptions, and how these affect research decisions, particularly framing questions and goals of the research. Reflecting on the research relationship involves examining one's relationship to the other and how the dynamics of this relationship influence certain responses to questions, actions and shared experience (Hsiung, 2010).

As Hall & Tandon (2017) pointily argue, "the very practice of listening and understanding our differences is decolonizing the institutions that have long been closed" (Hall & Tandon, 2017, p. 17). It is decolonizing because engaging in these collective reflexive practices can strengthen internal power-sharing and capacity (Wallerstein et al., 2020). This approach to participatory research can get very well married with the 'problem-posing approach' that Freire (1996) conceptualizes in which the researchers are engaged in the process of critical questioning. This questioning is about issues that are important to the communities and the researchers themselves and forces them to be critical of each other's perspectives. Freire's writings have contributed to the notion that emancipation of this kind of interaction between university and community can occur when the oppressor and the oppressed come together to reflect on reality critically (Freire, 1996). As Fine & Torre (2019) clearly put it: "Participatory contact zones ignite the catalytic insights produced when very differently positioned people join together to critically examine what is, and to creatively imagine what could be" (Fine & Torre, 2019, p. 436).

Because of the limited spaces (space, time, skills) to have these open dialogs and the politicization of each researcher's positionality, mutual learning and critical (self)-reflexive practices were hampered, eventually affecting the reflexive cycles with the community of Siribinha. Still, some reflections had

started to be collectively discussed, namely the reflection Lucas gained over the years over his own role in the research. Different UFBA team members could reflect on Lucas's role as well, yet they were less incentivized to reflect on themselves and their within relationships critically.

For example, Lucas explained what had happened during his presence in the school, and how those teachers and other participating did have the feeling of being subordinate because they never disagreed with him, or brought any input or ideas. "they were mostly just accepting whatever I said and that is not good". He added with a smile "It is practical though, we would get the action plan very fast haha". Camilla also went up to him, she told me. "I said to Lucas, it seems like a very different meeting when you are not there. They all talked and came up with ideas themselves". "I decided not to take part in these workshops anymore because of that" he said in a serious tone.

It is not the first nor last time that Lucas got confronted with the impact of his presence in the participatory meetings, events or workshops. The same happened during the participatory workshops of Fernanda and Mariana. Mariana remembered, "I said to Lucas, look the dynamics of our participatory workshop change a lot when you don't take part in it so actively". Mariana told me he immediately agreed and decided to stay on the sideline during the meetings "I think that shows an outstanding attitude for this kind of work" she said, determined.

"For real participation and collaboration to occur" Camilla explained, "people need to really speak out their thoughts on the project. Achieving this is most difficult for Lucas. You really have to break the ice, even more as a professor". She went on with a sympathetic smile "I think Lucas has the notion, but he is unable to put it into practice. I think, in theory it all is marvelous and truly wonderful" she said showing a grand but somewhat fake smile "but in practice there are a lot of barriers to overcome" she said, referring to current participatory strategies used by the UFBA team. "Not Lucas, I think he might be the one most open to hear critique, he always listened to me with an open heart. He let me speak to him in full detail without interrupting me".

At his last interview with me, Lucas elucidated that of course, we, as coming from the UFBA, always had some kind of imbalance in valorization. "But I think it is more the social hierarchy of coming from a university than that the fact that they would really think we know more or are wiser than them". Felipe also addressed this issue, saying that researchers did many interviews in a couple of days in the past. After some other team members saw it, they went up to Lucas to explain that this kind of research harmed the relationship with the community for all of the team. As he often does, he agreed and talked to that researcher to explain why this strategy of collecting a lot of data in a short time could be harmful to the relation of the team with the community. "I explained that it would be good if he would sit down and have a beer with some of the fishermen, for example. Now he understands, he already improved a lot on that", Lucas said very contently.

With the same pragmatism, not long before my sudden covid-19 induced return to the Netherlands, a code of conduct was established to create rules for how to behave in the community. Lucas said the idea for a code of conduct had been hanging for a while, but that now finally the moment had arrived. However, he was sure to clarify "all that now is in the code of conduct I have already discussed many times with the team, it should be nothing new to them". In a flashback, I remembered how his mantra was repeated in the first meeting and how I found everyone looked bored hearing his mantra all over and over again. To Lucas this was obvious information, he had already talked about it a lot in his mantras. Yet was it so obvious? How come I had such difficulty with translating that obvious information to practice myself? The code of conduct seemed the most pragmatic a-la-Lucas approach to deal with this issue. "If we have that document written, and we make a separate simplified document for the community, we have all our guidelines shared and on paper". Yet, I found much of the written text and theory building within the group and had a hard time finding its way to actual

practice. It made me aware that the first instinct to deal with these issues is still a very academically trained way of writing down whatever is an issue hoping that writing about it will dissolve it—publishing a paper or holding a meeting on it. I remembered Felipe admitting “Lucas has more of a focus on publishing, which is very important as well, but I don’t care so much I just want to see those animals”. It seems like some issues, like these complex relations, just need more actions.

5.2 PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH WITHIN THE UFBA TEAM

Besides the dynamics between the UFBA team and the community and how they engaged in research, another main space of interaction is dominant in shaping how the UFBA team went about doing research; their internal interaction, relationships, collaboration and communication. After months of attending meetings, working together, going to Siribinha and going out together and sharing experiences and life stories, I saw how this group of researchers was doing something very rare and progressive in the context of the Biology Institute of the UFBA, and even rare in Biology or ecology science more generally. At the same time, I felt some crucial issues were not dealt with regarding these UFBA team internal dynamics. The different aspects I found to be essential for collaboration with a community of the Siribinha are also needed within the group of the UFBA team, and I felt this latter point was not getting its deserved attention. As a result next to doing progressive work and having established a more informal and trustworthy relation with the professors, and senior researchers I found distrust, disengagement, and knowledge evasion became the main features of the collaborative academic transdisciplinary difficulties of this. On top of that, even if the group, and especially Lucas, is determined to be less led by dominant structures within the academy and the competitive academic culture, I found these issues still guide and stir the forms of collaboration within the UFBA-team and the lab as a whole, as I will elaborate in the following pages.

5.2.1 DIFFERENCE WITHIN THE UFBA TEAM

Before getting into the difference that I witnessed within the UFBA teams, it is important to situate this project and the team as a whole as very different from the conventional scientific context it operates in. Since many laboratories stay strictly in their discipline, the project in Siribinha and Popoas is quite unique within the UFBA environment, and let alone the environment of the Biology institute. With Lucas’s goal of bringing different kinds of knowledge systems (also nonacademic ones) together and developing a transdisciplinary research project he is really the odd one out, in the first place. The project the researchers of the UFBA team were engaging with is, besides progressive in comparison with other work done at the institute, one that did not strike with much other laboratories. In comparison with how other laboratories at the UFBA and in Brazil as a whole work with much more disciplinary restriction and conventional scientific criteria, this group of researchers already had the commonality of being interested in another type of research. As Lucas put it

“I think what motivates people in the group, and also the professors and all others involucrate in this project, is that we have a lot of aligned values”.

Indeed, looking at political statements in the Ethno-Siribinha app, a lot of the researchers overlapped in their political ideals. Besides, all researchers in the group could agree with the pertinence of working trans disciplines for dealing with societal challenges in general. Vivi even studies the transdisciplinary processes of how academic disciplines transect and involve with society in the case of Siribinha for her post-doc research, showing that there was a common will to learn and become better at working transdisciplinary.

Yet, not surprising for such a broad transdisciplinary project, I found many differences within the UFBA team and the way they approach research, and engagements with the community. Differences in the

kind of languages, the theoretical approaches and the methodological tools to be used can be alienating for such transdisciplinary research groups Ghosh (2020) argues. As her deconstruction of a two-year transdisciplinary research illustrates, often the most profound conflicts arise between the methodologies and approaches to research between natural scientists and social scientists, as well as the differences between the groups in terms of socio-economic and political location in society (Ghosh, 2020). "This had a negative impact on the design aspect resulting from a lack of consensus on various epistemic conflicts between various design approaches and obfuscated the contextuality and objective of the study." (Ghosh, 2020, p. 1118). In the UFBA team I found similar challenges that seemed to become bigger the more I became sensitive for them.

Some researchers made clear they thought the various socio-economic and political backgrounds of the UFBA team had strong implications for collaboration and the approach to research within the group. One of the senior researchers told me "I believe there is little acknowledgment of the fact that many researchers live in very different worlds as well, and that these lived experiences shape their ways of going about research very much. I mean...someone that never had to worry about being able to pay for basic education, experiences life just differently". Ana addressed the different social and political locations the researchers' group came from, connecting it to the way they related to community.

"Some people can just not relate to a traditional community because they have had an upbringing in which they were given whatever they wanted. They don't know what it is to struggle for something. They do not feel the interest to get to know the 'other (...). It should be part of your personality, wanting to make that connection".

Yet the topic of privileges and difference within the UFBA team was only very lightly mentioned in a common setting. Even on a one-to-one basis, these issues seemed taboo and very hard to talk about in the group. Smith et al., (2010) warns for the unpreparedness of academics in dialoging about these personal issues as it "entails an openness and an interpersonal vulnerability to which university researchers may be unaccustomed vis-a`-vis other research participants; moreover, this is an ongoing part of the work, and researchers should not be let by idealized conceptualizations of mutuality and trust" (Smith et al., 2010, p. 422).

At social occasions these differences divided the team as well, and it was mostly a lack of these social occasions that strengthened difference and alienation in the team. "There are no real moments for socialization. One of those possible moments was the lunch after the symposium you (referring to me) attended as well. We could not pay for it. We had spent all our money on rent and the field trip in Poças that we paid from our own pocket because we felt that was a priority. We had no financial conditions whatsoever to pay for that expensive lunch. That was very painful" one researcher said.

Difference in terms of gender, and how that could affect the research and create more engendered forms of research, was discussed amongst the team to some degree. As a result some researchers had become more aware of their position and this difference. "I have to confess," Pedro said during our bus ride to a conference, "it wasn't until Fernanda spoke to Lucas, and Lucas brought that forward to the group, that I realized how different it is for me to research than for her being a woman. And you know what I might never know what it is like". I started to speak about my impressions about the different ways male researchers and female researchers interacted with the community. Pedro looked at me with intense eyes "To be honest, I have no idea how it feels to be uncomfortable and feel physically insecure, or be scared of being sexualized without consent". I was happy he had that moment of realization, but less pleased he did not bring this up during group meetings or interactions with the UFBA team afterwards.

Moreover, the difference in personality is something that, although somewhat obvious, cannot be underestimated either in the context of collaboration. The people on the team differed substantially in terms of lived-experiences and how they have formed their insecurities, virtues, human and social skills, and personalities more general. After some months of hearing researchers giving me one-to-one valuable feedback for the group and the project as a whole, I asked them how and why they communicated about it the way they did. "I am a shy person" Fernanda explained with her eyebrows frown down. "I don't like to go and talk to a group of people, not women and even less men". When I asked her why she did not bring some critical comments forward in the UFBA team meetings she pulled her shoulder "I don't know, I don't like to talk in groups. I am very shy. I always am afraid others might think I am stupid, or I said something that is not at all relevant for the discussion". Ana declared "I know I have more ease with talking in groups. Mostly theatre help me in this respect". For example one researcher told me "I always felt an outsider, like I couldn't fit in anywhere (...) and with groups I still take a bit of a wait-and-see position, to see which way the wind blows, you know?".

Hence, what Ghosh (2020) stated about the possible conflict in transdisciplinary projects rings true for the UFBA team to some degree, where diverging and sometimes conflicting disciplines, trainings, and socio-economic and political locations had to mingle in with each other. Yet, in contrast to Ghosh (2020), I argue even if inevitable, the differences and disaccords within the UFBA team were not problematic in themselves. As pointed out earlier in the context of collaboration from the UFBA team with the people in Siribinha, it is rather the lack of acknowledging these differences, and engaging in honest and constructive conversations about these tensions that harms collaboration (Brayboy et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2010). Uncomfortable conversations about their differences were rarely spearheaded, even if various doubts, judgements, assumptions and distrust grew out of these differences. Only in a one-to-one conversation with me, many of the researchers acknowledged these tensions. It became clear to me that positionality as portrayed by Bozalek (2011), Crasnow (2009; 2019), and Hall & Tandon (2017) was not only important for the collaboration with the community, but also had a main role in driving internal dynamics within the UFBA team. In my view, collaboration and conflict within the UFBA team did not get the attention it deserved.

5.2.2 COLLABORATION AND COMPETITION

Lucas clearly pursued to have a high degree of collaboration, between the different disciplines and between young and senior researchers. He seemed to see connections everywhere "ah I think it is really important that you collaborate and discuss this issue with X", "this work has of course a great relevance for Y and her work", and comments like "X and Y could jointly craft a paper in response to this". The senior researchers worked well together as far as I could notice. For example, no conflict occurred while jointly supervising the thesis of the master students on the UFBA team. Lucas mentioned the importance of solidarity and collaboration within the team repeatedly during his interviews, meetings, the repetitive mantra's and in the Whatsapp group. He always underscored the importance of the team to help each other with each other's projects, something I found heartwarming. He acknowledged that it sometimes happens that they just want to fix their own project and that's it, but he said to have clearly expressed himself against this attitude in different meetings, as I had similarly witnessed during meetings. When I asked to what extent the team would help each other during the field trip he explained most of the other researchers attend the participatory workshops. "They often come and sit in a corner without interfering too much, only Pedro stays at home sometimes to start to order and analyze his freshly gathered data". Indeed, I had found some more comradeship-like relations within the UFBA team during the week of fieldwork, some even had a friend-like relationship.

In our chat in a café close to the university, Lucas told some anecdotes about field trips of another professor he joined where he experienced very heavy fights between the students. "That was really a

big brother of science, it was crazy (...) I think it helps that mostly I always go along with them (referring to the UFBA team)". In contrast with many other laboratories at the UFBA he would go together with the group of students and guide them not only in the researching experience but also in how to work jointly. Every evening the different researchers would get together and discuss their experiences under his guidance. "One time" Camilla said with twinkling eyes

"we did a game during field research, and we had all to write down three words to describe how we experienced field work. Afterwards, we had to guess who had written what word. Lucas guessed every word rightfully. He is very good in that, he knew exactly how I felt about the project and what words I would use."

The memory of this game had left a generous smile on her face, "he is very special" she said "and he knows his students very well".

"I have seen no conflicts within the team" Lucas said, somewhat proud, down in the café. "I feel there is a very good relationship between the members in the group", he said while taking a sip of his coffee. Also, when field trips are done, people relate very well with each other he explained. "Some minor issues might have come up when trying to organize field trips but nothing really that is worth remembering." He elaborated saying the project naturally asked for it with its form of conduct and relationship with the community. "Also when it comes to possible ambitions in science." If it was the students' ambitions to write or publish many articles, he declared, this was not the best project. This what helped the team get along with each other as well. He added " I never had to use my position of authority to call anyone to attention for anything". On the contrary, he had an continuous urge to make jokes, and was always asking about how everyone was doing.

Besides the gray tables and the white trip light, the lab as a whole had thus a very informal and pleasant atmosphere. As mentioned at the beginning of the previous chapter his office was in the middle of an open lab, he sat close to his colleagues and students and had no separate room, therefore he was easily approachable. The small kitchen and others working at the lab (also people outside of the UFBA team) would come to work at the lab, sharing coffee's, talking about the daily lunch meal they had brought from home, and laughing about the usual defects of the lab's physical state that always started leaking when it would rain. Lucas was always up for informal gatherings, for instance, we had some street food together more than once. Although not very often, once in a while we would go for drinks together.

Many people in lab told me anecdotes about Lucas, showing the good relationship he had with his students and colleagues. A great majority of anecdotes were jokes, some explained how much they enjoyed having a beer with him, and others how understanding he was when they had passed through difficult times. "Suddenly I was left without a scholarship, I had to leave my house, and had so many personal issues going on I was unable to work on my proposal" Thais said partly reviving that moment in time. "He was very supportive in those times and that meant a lot to me". Everyone had personal stories to share and seemed to not only look up to him only as a professional and professor, but often also in more personal terms acknowledging him as a friend. Moreover, I could tell from my first interactions with the group some of them felt comfortable sharing their doubts with Lucas on a one-to-one basis. "he always listens to me, and takes me very serious" Ana said "often my remarks are than later brought to the group by him". Almost all of the UFBA team members told me Lucas would always take the time and listen carefully when they were uncomfortable about issues relating to the team, their own research, or the communication with the community of Siribinha. This is something that is really important for collaboration within the team and situating the collaborative focus and informality of this lab in the context of other labs at the UFBA or any other Brazilian University for that matter, I found it was quite exceptional.

Hence, there is to some extent a collaborative environment present that was quite exceptional in the way it functioned and in terms of the collaborations that took place mostly between senior researchers and senior and young researchers when situating it in the broader context of the lab. Yet, only after several month of being with UFBA team members, and hanging around the lab I found that next to the friendly and collaborative attitude of some researchers in the ethno-Siribinha group, I found evidence that progress in terms of collaboration was very limited and therefore the UFBA team was not really living up to that ideal.

While asking the rest of the team about how collaboration would flow, at least three-quarters of the researchers responded that there is no real collaboration amongst the younger researchers. Solidarity was missing many of them confessed "I've tried to set up some collective effort to make a document with often used local language...but no one picked it up", one said. "During the participatory workshops there are other team members playing soccer" another said frustrated elaborating "How can we be credible about the importance of participation in this event, and motivate people in the community to come if apparently our own team doesn't think it is that important?"

Most of all the sharing of knowledge, data, insight on the process of research, or things like first drafts was very limited due to mistrust, different researchers illustrated.

"The team doesn't go into details in those evenings, everyone talks about their work as superficial as possible. In the end nobody trusts each other. I wanted to collaborate and know about the research of others, but they seem to keep their results for themselves".

Others came with similar stories "People within the team do not even speak about one-third of what they really research and what they find" one argued. "it seems nobody really want to go into details about how they communicate or what kind of relation they have" another researcher said adding "I honestly think there is a problem of trust within our group, and I am complicit in it".

"It seems like people are afraid that others will go off with the data of someone else and misuse it". "I feel like nobody is happy for you if you make progress in your academic career, people are rather jealous (...)The distrust within the group, is strange and feels bad"

One researcher said while elaborating that everyone was pretending as if everything is okay, because nobody wants trouble, and nobody wanted to be the trouble-maker either. The idea of misfortune was also vividly present "maybe it is only my feeling, or my insecurity, but I feel people do not actually wish you the best. There is so much competition that people are not happy for each other". This mistrust hindered not only sharing data, information, and knowledge in general, it did also prevent the team from actually giving feedback, comments, or healthy doses of criticism. Of all the interviews, at least half of the team felt that there might be space to bring up criticism or feedback theoretically, but in reality, trust in each other was lacking to do so. "I feel people will take it very personal, if I would give comments or share by doubt about something they are doing" another said.

Likewise, a genuine and safe foundation was lacking that could encourage researchers to give each other critical feedback regarding the work in Siribinha, while at the same time, it is this feedback that could have significantly influenced the participatory attitude and practices of researchers in Siribinha. "Also, between us, we are many at a meeting, and even though there is some space to talk with so many people there is not enough space to talk and put our kind of worries on the table" one said. "you don't give your opinion because if it's critical people might think you just want to put them down. It will be taken personally I feel". Another said "In theory, it is all wonderful and our collaborations are also all very beautiful, but in practice, it is a completely different world. Thus, the meetings did not created the wished effect insofar as they had the aim to encourage lively discussions, collaboration and connection within the team.

Competition and behind-the-scene interests can be fierce in such research groups, and the implication this can have for knowledge and feedback sharing and working together should not be underestimated Hernaus et al., (2019) argues. Reciprocity between professor and student is essential for collaboration and has gained quite some attention (Matthews, 2017; Matthews et al., 2018) but reciprocity and trust between students is at the least as crucial (Fransman et al., 2021; Hernaus et al., 2019). The mistrust I found evidence for point at how much competitive environments shape the degree to which participation and collaboration work amongst them (Hernaus et al., 2019). Although less has been written about the within group dynamics and distrust and difference within research groups in scholarship on decolonizing research and methodologies, I feel the literature on feminist and PAR methodology that that tries to move towards more decolonial forms of engaging with communities is very well applicable and should be brought to bear within the researchers groups with aims of doing participatory research as well. As Muhammad et al., (2015, p 1047) states “social identity/location and status of research team members may be some of the more salient, though under-theorized, dimensions of power and privilege within community-based participatory research partnerships”.

Moreover, I found evidence for substantial disagreements about ‘what acceptable methodologies are’ to engage with in Siribinha. As a result, I started disbelieving that the project naturally filtered students and young researchers that were like-minded, at least not to the extent Lucas was convinced about. Gustavo, Ana and Camilla made it very clear: It should be a prerequisite, if you will work with the community, you should stay one month with the community first to get to know them. Funding was lacking to facilitate this, yet “even with the money or funds to do so, many people just don’t really have the ambition to really get to know the ‘other’” one researcher argued. Some team members declared it was clear that most of the researchers did not seem eager to immerse, share, or get to know the community profoundly. “If I have to analyze the whole group, there is actually just a small part of the team that cares” another researcher said. Ana smirked a bit during our talk “I was surprised by you, positively I mean hehe (...) you coming from another place, but still feeling the real interest to get immersed and really be with and in the community”. I awkwardly laughed this compliment away. I asked what the difference was between me and others, she responded it was the actual willingness I had to create an empathic relationship with the community. “Leaving the community because there is no internet anymore or because it rains, that is not being in the community. I see many of the people involved in the project going to the community but not being in the community. That is really a weak point”.

As I had experienced the work from other researchers as well, I understood what point these researchers wanted to make. At the same time, however, I felt a lot of the disregard, or lack of disposition they saw in other team members was also based on assumptions since I had seen true worries about the community in a lot of the researchers. These negative assumptions were fueled by the fact that no true conversations were openly held on this matter. Not formally, and not in informal ways. Not directly, and sometimes indirectly, through Lucas who would often try to muffle the issue by throwing this ‘hot cloth’. “Lucas has been preaching about it, but preaching alone won’t help. We need actual practical guidance to do so” one researcher rightfully stated. As Chevalier & Buckles (2013) and Hernaus et al., (2019) argue, “good will’ alone is not enough to bring together an interdisciplinary group, in the hope that an exchange of ideas will come about of its own accord. Instead of merely provoking these often uncomfortable discussions with the community in question, Smith et al. (2010) address the importance of openly dialogue positions and social-political locations of university researchers between themselves before starting any research project. As described by Smith et al., (2010) in her endeavor to get into the space between idealism and realism of PAR she states,

"Before our first community meeting, we had several discussions within the university PAR team of our reasons for engaging in the research, as well as how we thought our own social identities concerning race, class, gender, and sexual orientation would influence it." (p. 411)

As mentioned before, lack of these open conversations across differences might prevent such a diverse group from relating to each other and share life experiences and stories that form the baggage they bring to the research group. There was thus a difficulty for the UFBA team to create the adequate space, time and atmosphere to talk about difference in researchers' identities and their positionalities as Smith et al., (2010) mentions here, and therefore, it became even tougher to resolve mistrust and feelings of competition in the group and boost collaborative attitudes among them. The actual time and patience needed to develop trustful relationships, and the attention, sensitivity and care for dialogues to come about, in a way that turn worthwhile, are a hard to fit with academic competitive culture (Hernaus et al., 2019).

Ironically, most researchers did want this situation to change and felt the urge to have closer ties, connections, feedback and help within the research groups. They just were in need of a little push and guidance for doing so. For instance, one of the researchers told me she knew that she could very well collaborate with another researcher, because they were doing the same kind of work. "Yet, I feel like she didn't want to collaborate, or didn't feel the need to collaborate." I looked at her with surprise "well... I have to confess, I became too insecure to ever approach her. Maybe she thinks the same about me hehe", she said embarrassed. And indeed, the other researcher had told me exactly the same thing about her. Obviously, both actually liked the idea of collaborating and helping each other out, yet factors such as being shy, but also the competitive and distrustful atmosphere in the group greatly obstructed actual collaboration. "We should talk about it, we think it is important that the team will communicate better with one another, especially now that Lucas is leaving. The kind of academic culture where you have to portray yourself as better is definitely not helping the situation", one explained. "This really gets in the way of improving the participatory research in Siribinha," another said.

Lucas knew that the group was not constantly collaborating as much as they could. His reaction seemed to be that of restating it in a meeting and make yet another Whatsapp comment. It became part of his mantra. In addition, as shown in his own publications, he is at least conceptually well aware "trust enables agreement on actions, information sharing and deeper levels of learning, adaptation, and potential transformation of both research and, most importantly, the reality with which we engage in our studies" (El-Hani & Almeida, 2010). Lucas was thus well-aware of the implications that difference and different backgrounds could have on working in transdisciplinary projects as he pointed out in his own publication (Fuentes & Almeida, 2010), yet to deal with these issues he either restated the importance of collaboration and trust in the meetings, or he would throw 'a hot cloth' over these issues, as Ana had explained, trying to smooth over the situation. "Some things I say to Lucas, some other things I do not tell him. For example, the stuff about someone eating all the food and not leaving anything for the rest I did tell him. Lucas answered, 'but then we just buy some more food tomorrow'. Of course, I understood the point here wasn't about food, but about the feeling of solidarity and conviviality as a group and a team. For Ana this once again showed how much that was missing. "Lucas would just throw a cloth of hot water, as my grandma would say", which means he would try to appease the situation circumventing the actual issue.

Maybe mentioning its importance in a meeting was not enough? And perhaps not discussing the issues out and open but diplomatically smoothing them over into silence was not a sustainable strategy to deal with this either? For example, one time someone seemed to have told him in private that people were afraid of one stealing ideas from others, and therefore they were not at ease with the

idea of collaboratively publishing; problems could rise with whoever was first author (as is not uncommon in academic culture). He took this issue very weighty and addressed it in a meeting “oh, and I also wanted to talk about the issue of collaboration. It cannot be that you are demotivated to co-author pieces, everyone’s work should be protected. If you have not done the data gathering and are revising a piece, you cannot become the first author. We don’t want this kind of things happening in the Lab, intellectual property should be protected. That doesn’t mean that you should not try and collaborate more with each other”. And so he had mentioned it, indeed, but for those truly listening after two hours, only pharisaic smiles were left “ahuuh”, “hmmhmm”, “yes yes” and no real discussion was sparked. In his role as educator (and a pragmatic one) I felt his rationale was ‘well if I state it clearly, and mention its importance then it will be dealt with’. As is the case with the benefits for the community, unfortunately, not many issues work like that.

5.3 INFLUENCE OF THE ACADEMIC INSTITUTE

As mentioned in the very beginning of this story, I had initial observations regarding the influence that academic structures and cultures how the group behaved and was organized. This did not only get confirmed, but the academy also showed to be more forcefully inducing certain ways of thinking about research and doing research than I had imagined. It became apparent that the possibility for research to include equitable and just participation is shaped by the degree to which neoliberal agendas seep into academic institutions (Bovill et al., 2016; de Sousa Santos, 2009; Stanton, 2014), and accordingly, their research groups (Hernaus et al., 2019). In the following section I will further elaborate how the academy has influenced and shaped the extent of participation in the case of Siribinha.

5.3.1 HIERARCHY, STATUS AND CONTROL AT WORK

While better scrutinizing the internal dynamics of the UFBA I found that much of these dynamics were facilitated by the by how institutional structures limited collaboration. Within hierarchical structures of academic institutions as the Biology Institute acidic features such as the status and appraisal Lucas has in the academic world, how he was looked up against by students and colleagues, and the control he tried to keep over the project more generally, structure and shape the collaborative practices within the research group and this, in turn, has implications for collaboration with the community. The dynamics of collaboration, conflict and distrust within the UFBA lab can be better understood by better understanding how these are situated in this context.

Fransman et al., (2021) argues, that the inequitable configurations of power that drench the ‘within’ space of transdisciplinary research projects, often make fair and equitable research truly challenging. Stanton (2014) puts it in terms of hierarchy, something that reflects the witnessed dynamics in the group. He argues hierarchical structures intrinsic to academic culture often impede certain types of horizontal collaborations, not just with another non-academic community, but also within the university structures. These power imbalances, Matthews et al., (2018) states, hinder the possibility for reciprocal relationships that are very important for collaboration, within and outside the academy. Muhammad et al., (2015, p. 1048) also reminds us that

“external and internalized power dimensions are the underlying context for academic collaboration (...) which may exist within the academic team of principal investigator (often still from a white and more privileged background) and other investigators or research staff”.

It is therefore difficult for students to feel comfortable with sharing doubts and critiques or renegotiating the roles they play in research, making it a real challenge to re-situate power (Matthews et al., 2018b). Reciprocal relationships are needed within research projects between students and their

'superiors' and in order to come to those relationships one needs to gain shared respect, trust and recognition of diverse sets of expertise, Matthews et al., (2018b) argues. The values upon which relationships are established frame how people see themselves and each other. Therefore, academic values and culture related to status and hierarchies, often shape how the students see themselves and how professors, or academic superiors see themselves, and most importantly, how they relate to each other. Often little attention is paid to these 'in-between' spaces where individuals can challenge assumptions and roles at universities (Tuhiwai, 1999; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2015; Hernaus et al., 2019; Stanton, 2014), and the before mentioned dynamics within the UFBA team very much portray this, shaping the extent to which students dare to bring criticism forward and how she or he relates to others as illustrated in the previous sub chapter.

Ana told me she shares a lot of her doubts and feedback with Lucas but does not feel fully comfortable displaying her discordance because of the negative impacts it might have on her work and academic career, she made clear.

"In the meeting it is hard to speak, because sometimes you trust that one person (Lucas), but you don't trust the other. So just in case, you shut up and be quiet. And in person is difficult as well because sometimes other professors are involved in the projects. Giving my opinion could only bring me trouble, I don't know how well Lucas knows the other professor but it can be not so wise to give my opinion".

Except for Felipe, Mariana, Thais and Pedro, all other researchers told me they did not feel completely relaxed opening up, not to Lucas, and even less to the rest of the team.

Contrastingly, at the same time it was clear Lucas tried to see his students as partners, trying to soften those hierarchical structures of academia. Not only through his informal and good relationship to the different researchers as illustrated before, but also in terms of taking other people's expertise seriously. I found shared respect, shared trust, shared recognition of expertise, and in his one-to-one contact Lucas seemed to permeate trust and respect to his students almost as much as they respect him. Lucas had a significant extent of reciprocity between everyone working on the project. In contrast to the interactions of the younger researchers amongst each other, they did feel more comfortable talking with Lucas, as with some of the more senior researchers, about sensitive things. A lot of members feel Lucas is the only person that they can talk to and that takes them seriously. "Lucas always takes my comments very serious" Mariana said, "and he knows very well how to manage and guide the different students". "He always has taken all my feedback seriously, sometimes he acts upon it directly, sometimes he waves it away eventually" Ana said. "If there is anyone I can talk with about this it is Lucas, but often it seems like I have said nothing afterwards, but he listens", Fernanda said. Lucas appreciated it very much every time a student or colleague researcher spoke out, proposed readings or action to take for the group and he valued comments made by my students.

In these terms Lucas has attempted to create more horizontal forms of collaboration. Matthews et al., (2018) illustrates how the practice of treating students as partners can have positive effect on the different relationships between students and professors, in that way softening the power imbalances imbedded in academic projects structures by default. Along the paths of Freire (1970) Bovill et al., (2016) suggest both students and teachers or professors can develop a transformed sense of self and self-awareness, to dissolve deep-seated hierarchical boundaries that traditionally separate and entitle certain roles and engage with them in new ways. Yet, as rings true for Lucas and the team, it is hard to change some of these predetermined roles and responsibilities without the critical questioning exercise, because a professor might not be fully aware of how exactly these deep seated hierarchical boundaries interplay with their daily practices in a research group. As one research exemplified with a bored voice "One talks in the meeting more than the other, than the other, it is really something from

academia. And then the meetings, it is always the same, the same riddle, he speaks for three hours and then we go home” .

The centrality in his predetermined role as professor had in the project was noticeable analyzing looking at how communication streams with often, if not always, go through Lucas. Because many researchers share their doubts and issues with Lucas but not with the rest, this (unwillingly) strengthens his status and increases a sense of hidden competition between the UFBA team researchers. This becomes evident in the reaction most researchers had when I asked them why they did not make certain comments with the group as a whole, but only directly to Lucas. One smiled a little awkwardly “well I prefer to talk to Lucas and then if it is important he can share it with the group”. Again, connecting to the previous sub chapter, as a result of his constant mediating position Lucas has, tensions that exist within the group would not come to light.

Besides mediating communication streams between the different researchers, another aspect augmenting his central positions was the dependency of almost every choice on him. This makes him even more central in the groups functioning. There was little autonomy for the researchers in making their own decisions without consultation. Mostly, however, Lucas was mostly okay with everything and let researchers go on their own way. Yet, the way the group functioned made it natural for everyone to consult all choices and steps with him first. This does not take away the fact that he is very flexible and open to change his mind. It is rather that a particular feedback, idea or argument would not be substantially valued and therefore have limited implications, until Lucas would take over that particular argument. Not only hierarchy but also the status he has and de value and appreciation that other researchers have for him explain this dynamic. Although Lucas was aware of the power differences between professors and students, he did not see this having detrimental effect on his own research group. “I think people know I listen to them, at least I always try to be there for any doubt” he said during my first long talk with him “people often come to me, so I think we are good as far as I know”. His status, and the admiration many researchers had for him, seem to glide off Lucas’ own shoulder, it however did not so much glide off the shoulders of the other researchers and the UFBA team influencing the within dynamics.

Even if in contrast to many other professors at the UFBA he would not use his authority often, the fact that everything stands or falls around him seems to bring (unintended) great dependency on Lucas for the project and the functioning of the researchers in general. He has his hand in just about everything that's corrosive to the spirit. Some within the team framed it in terms of control.

“sometimes I think he is overprotective of the project and wants to control everything that happens, but the team is getting bigger and bigger. At some point it will become impossible for him (...) but lately he is doing better, he is learning to let go haha”.

“It is not like he doesn't want to listen; it is just he is very enthusiastic and with it, he wants to keep control”, another said while imitating Lucas's enthusiasm. In our conversations he acknowledged he was indeed 'learning to let go', trying to provoke students and other researchers to be pro-active and take responsibility for certain tasks. Often in the WhatsApp group he would ask “who want to take responsibility for X?”, or he asked directly “X, do you have the capacity to take responsibility for organizing this?”. Still, he would attempt to oversee everything and be involved in almost every decision that could be taken.

As soon as the project is centered around one leading professor so much, and status and hierarchies of academia are involved and reinforced, it is hard to shift power to the group as a whole and create a common sense of responsibility and a horizontal way of working. Sounds familiar? Indeed, again the theory of PAR and decolonizing and feminist methodologies very much apply, as Reason & Bradbury

(2006) state it is very difficult to shift power after a project has started, and although they refer to the asymmetrical relationship in university-community settings, these dynamics very much apply as well to the power inequities within the university, as Wolff (2002) argues. Since the researchers were used to this kind of dynamic and the position Lucas had in it, it was common sense and almost intuitive to first discuss every decision with him.

Unless openly spoken about, these roles and hierarchies shaped by the construct of conventional academic frameworks, institutes, and culture became naturalized and fortified, making true partnership almost impossible Fransman et al., (2021) and Hernaus et al., (2019) argue. Precisely because most communication went through him, it made mutual trust less of a precondition for the project, or at least the distrust became less noticeable, partly blinding Lucas for these dynamics. In fact, I noticed the limited acknowledgment and dialoguing about these issues within the UFBA team, made the UFBA team less resilient for dealing with the way the features of the academic institution and culture pushed for certain ways of working together.

5.3.2 POSITIVISTIC METHODS, AND METHODOLOGY

Another way in which the influence of the academic institutional structures in this research project was made visible, was in terms of guiding methodology, and methods. Lucas always mediated between them, eloquently arguing how they would not be excluding one another, or at least not fully. Again, in comparison with other laboratory at the Biology Institute, this group of researchers was combining a diverse and rather progressive set of methods and methodologies. However, I experienced a tension between the methodology and method requirements driven by academic criteria inside the Biology Institute and the aims for participation in Siribinha that could not be married with one another.

In line with PAR, feminist methodologies, especially in these transdisciplinary projects, not an abstract ideal of scientific objectivity is what generates epistemic quality, but rather its function of socio-political quality (Rosedahl et al, 2015). Therefore, as Reason & Bradbury (2006) argue, it is the depth of the relationship, the different forms of knowing, practical relevance and the durability of the research that measures the validity. Feminist scholars such as Elmhirst (2018) state that researchers should therefore stop being uncomfortable about having a subjective position, and rather work on making those positions more explicit. Situating knowledge in this way can, not only bring about a critical (self)reflection and analysis to the current context, but also contribute to research and practice that empowers and promotes social and ecological transformation (Elmhirst, 2018). In order to achieve this, they believe it is important to not cling onto an ideal of what elements would make science perfect, but rather problematize the supposed perfect 'value free' science and the conventional practices that lead to this 'perfect' science (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2015; Wylie & Sismondo, 2015). Yet, it is hard to blend and consolidate the methodological approach connected to these stances on science with those classical ones, such as for instance, those approaches within the ecology or biology master program.

Doubtlessly, Pedro's motivations for not sharing more detailed knowledge with most community members about what he was actually researching, and the way he tried to always stay out of spaces of friction like when talking to Daniel, are situated in the tensions between conventional scientific criteria and letting subjectivity enter the research process. To me, it was rather his the need to abide to academic rules imposed on him as an ecology PhD researcher, and the worries for furthering his academic career, than his incapacity or lack of willingness to relate with affect and empathy to the community that drove his practices in the field. This example really uncovers ways that academic institutions are inflected by structural inequities, and therefore learning to engage differently in science, is not encouraged but rather obstructed (Harding, 2016; Wylie & Sismondo, 2015). It is hard

for those new to these ways of going about research, because their presumed roles, procedures and values that they are used to in the university context will not serve them well in this new endeavor (Hall & Tandon, 2017; Smith et al., 2010), and they will have to struggle with the academic institution in general to be able make progress at all. That is why it is ever more pertinent to have these issues openly discussed, to prevent negative internal judgement of his actions will come about while he is left exposed to deal with this tension all by himself. As Camilla stated punctually,

For example Pedro, you could see in the way he did his quantitative research he was so focused on getting the data he needed, he did not seem to even care about how he himself was perceived by the community (...) yet this is more of a reflection of academia than it is of him personally, the often on hard core science focused master of Ecology sometimes also disables someone to work in any different way, as might have been the case for Pedro”.

In addition, this example also shows how academia, its deadlines and timelines in terms of publishing pace, and other similar requirements encourage a pragmatic and efficient focus on data gathering. In these temporal pressure often less space exists to focus on relations, positioning those relations, and cultivating and nurturing care, affect and trust in a reciprocal manner as it common in relational research done build on PAR and feminist methodologies. Even if Lucas and the research group aimed to do very progressive and social and politically just research in theory, this illustrates how difficult it can be to marry these different methodologies and epistemologies of science in practice. This is a more general problem with science that somehow the UFBA team did not manage to evade, Ana explained.

“A lot of research is being written on the backbone of academic papers that presuppose the importance of objectivity and on not being subjective while doing research” Ana argued. For her, neutrality is very strong, and has a lot of power. In certain parts of the project that positivism is very much present, she claimed. For her, it seemed many of the team did not really like the part of accepting subjectivity. She explained it seemed like it was already naturalized that researchers and the community should not be so personal and not so intimate. When I asked why she elaborated,

“Why? Because Lucas has certain positivistic ways of seeing the world as well. As science in general, which has its positivistic root. (...) Of course it is impossible for me to be neutral, I work with humans!”.

For her, neutrality is very much present in the more general ideas of the project and of the institute of Biology as a whole, and she argues Lucas was not always aware that he was reproducing these stances, when trying to live up to his responsibilities as leading professor of the Lab. “Lucas gets so enthusiastic about new collaborations and additions to the project. He just gets so excited, so passionate. But I feel he loses sight on the different and more positivistic approaches others might bring in”.

And indeed, only in the first two months after my arrival, new researchers were added to the group, of which some had to do about a hundred interviews in total. I heard Lucas repeat conventional academic rules in this smaller meeting with the researcher in question, focusing on as the minimum number of interviews or surveys for the validity of the sample, what instruments to use that solicit measurable characteristics, how to ensure objective scale of units of analysis, and what instruments to use to ensure objective and accurate collection of data. It seems Lucas was in a split between letting go on notions of traditional forms of objectivity and pure positivistic methods (that he reckoned as very dangerous) and keeping up with his responsibilities as professor. As a professor he was supervising students that because of their study criteria had to keep to at least a great deal of these conventional criteria.

Camila spoke out on this issue as well,

"He (Lucas) himself is imprisoned in this academic context. He has been slurped into this world for many years now and it is hard to come out".

"For me that neutrality is really confronting, especially when I see someone coming to the community with their notebook and just asking plant species and then leaving again, it is so dry", she said adding that in the beginning the project was really more open to subjectivities.

As stated in the beginning of this long story, Fernanda had touched upon this issue during my first weeks at the UFBA as well. She had complained about how certain more positivistic views were quite dominant in the Institute of Biology. My conversations with Mariana pointed at the same issues, even if she was the researcher that most highlighted and was worried about the political and social relevance of her work and about the potential for the community to empower themselves through the work she did with Fernanda, I had also noticed the fact that neutrality and objectivity played a big role for shaping her practices on the ground. One of the researchers summarized it as follows,

"Some people are just more indoctrinated with ambitions and interest of academia itself, and therefore hardly get out of the positivistic objective rationale for research, and yet others are really trying to get a participative process going on, but without really immersing in the community. In my view both make participatory research almost impossible"

The need for publications drove part of that contradiction between academia's mainstream requirements and the requirements for more meaningful participation. "Lucas often explained how academia is sometime a prison, also for him" Ana said. Moreover, other academic criteria such as the procedures in which research proposals have to be handed in, before even getting to the community, (as I had to do myself) make it really challenging to co-create research questions, jointly drive the direction of research and accordingly ensure benefits for the community.

The question remains if those methodologies really exclude one another. I believe it does not necessarily need to be that way, even if sometimes they are hard to combine and it is important to acknowledge this latter when relevant. Still, gathering quantitative data can be done next to investing in a deep and affective relationship with community members. Likewise, one can co-create the direction of the research and have a shared ownership of the research process that ends up gathering quantitative data which is based on more conventional methodologies. Engaging in research together by jointly gathering and analyzing data does not impede doing research that is based on more distant data. Yet, in order to marry the different approaches to research, one must be aware of how institutional limitations of the academy will often draw towards more harming practices that make it difficult to create strong and affective relationships next to them. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge relationship more prominently in each research, especially in context like the research in Siribinha, because the attention it deserved does not come of its own accord.

5.3.3 FUNDING AND NEED FOR MONEY ON THE LONG TERM

Another obstructing feature that became apparent very early during my stay, and was again highlighted in many other phases of this study, was the implications of the lack, and limitation, of funding for research. Recent cuts on education and the cancelation of funding aggravated this situation and severely affected the way to go about research, fieldwork and participation more particularly. The financial limits made it impossible to pay for longer stays of researchers, partly making clear why not all researchers could immerse in the community. Pedro explained he would have wanted to stay longer but his scholarship would not be directed towards that kind of long-stay fieldwork, Fernanda had told me something similar, as well as Thias. More than one researcher from UFBA team

acknowledged funding and financing of fieldwork as one of the barriers to real participatory research. "I would have wanted to stay three months minimum every time" Ana said.

Similarly, fieldwork was set up to maximize the utility of funds for all researchers on the team in a way that seemed most efficiency and pragmatic. Nonetheless, these funds showed to be insufficient and the group lost a the possibility for more constant and continuous contact. "Funding the project and keeping continuity with our fieldtrips is really becoming harder and harder every month". Thais spoke out during our car-trip to Siribinha, "continuity is important for our relationship with the community, but it seems Lucas has to reinvent creative ways all the time to find a way to fund the project".

Talking with Lucas about how he managed to fund this project along the years revealed the ingenious and creative ways in which he tried to cover for field trip expenses of the team. It is clear that he has tried with all his efforts and possibilities to keep the projects going, even without funding. These cuts on science and education have a serious impact, he says.

"We used to be there every month, in that manner it is way easier to connect and collaborate. But how can you collaborate when you don't have the money to get there and stay there? It is a difficult situation."

I thought of all the challenges I experienced and the issues highlighted in the sections and chapters before. Much of those problematic issues could be brought back to the fact that due to lack of sufficient funding, researchers had time pressure to do their research; little chunks of 5 days, all at the same time crammed together with ten other researchers. I definitely would not have been able to stay for that long in Siribinha and neither in Salvador if I had not had financial support and worked a side job to save money for this endeavor. Yet, according to some UFBA team members it's also about the disposition or eagerness to actually want to stay there longer.

"To be honest, I think Ana and me are in less of condition to pay for this ourselves but we still paid it out of our own pockets. Because it very much mattered to us. To have a deeper relationship with the community so that this 'participatory' work or collaboration with the community could actually work".

At some moment in my last long conversation, I asked Lucas if the issue of money brought the risk of influencing the projects in any way. He answered that it is very important to not let that influence the project indeed, and to his knowledge it had not badly directed the project. Yet, Camilla, Ana and Gustavo have seen that very differently, they explained in their interviews that the project is getting bigger and bigger. Mainly driven by the fact that new collaborators can possibly help fund the project as a whole.

"It is very understandable and painful because currently, if you want to work with science in this country, it is our only option to be funded, or find external sources for financing."

Gustavo said. Lucas had positioned himself in the same dilemma as well, only for him, it was clear that looking for more collaborations (and funding) had no impact on the content or approach of the researchers. In his last interview, he gave the example of a funding possibility during the oil tragedy with UBER. There was a possibility for UBER to fund projects that helped fisher's community in the northeast because of the oil spills. "We looked into that (referring to me) remember? And we decided that it would be dangerous if UBER wanted publicity on their side, so we didn't do it". I had to agree he was skeptical and immediately pulled back after we found out that UBER wanted publicity for its support.

While talking to Gustavo, Ana and Camilla however, the awareness of a political game unfolded regarding finance of the project. "If the money comes from the Netherlands let say, it comes to the project with a certain and more specific purpose, they all argued. Lucas seems not to acknowledge

that. But he will not allow anyone to be outspokenly questioning a Dutch partner for example, like you haha” one of them argued. “Of course, it has a great influence!” Camilla almost shouted with her soft voice. Beside external funding, Pedro and Fernanda gave the example of the ACCS as possibly problematic. Pedro had reflected on his own role as well “I did many interviews if you count all the ACCS students as well, we might have been too many. Afterwards I wish I could have spent more time not gathering data, as you did”. Also, Fernanda and Thais explained the only problems with people in the community (as Lucas also confessed) have been with students from the ACCS. Ana clarified,

“The ACCS course comes with 8 thousand reais, that covers the costs of two times going to the field. But on what costs? Having a bus ride into Siribinha full of students walking around and interviewing people in the community and abruptly leaving again (...) sometimes they come and look at the community like people going to the Zoo, but actually with so many people coming we turn out to be the Zoo and the community observing us haha”

In terms of feasibility of the eco-museum Lucas did acknowledge they were in a tricky position, because for the realization of the eco-museum they partly depend on money from the municipality. “We are (or try to be) the mediators between the community and the local politicians there. But we all work in different times. We as researchers have time, but local politicians want something done before their mandate is over, so they have something to show (...) Since we depend on funds from the municipality and the state government we have to maneuver between all stakeholders, it is a difficult position”, he elucidated.

In concordance with Lucas, Camilla and Fernanda told me the different timelines and priorities can hardly be streamlined. Camilla explained,

“There will be elections soon, I don’t think the same people are going to win. And then what? What happens to our project? I think Lucas looks at this somewhat to positively”.

Funding schemes and the lack of funding for long-lasting research projects highly challenge long-term commitments of the researchers in the community, and greatly shape the way fieldwork is done. This makes it hard to align the very different timelines that the academy has, with for example funding requirements of a certain number of publications per year for each PhD, with those timelines that the community is used of working with, let alone the two also blend it with the municipality’s timelines.

5.3.4 APPLICATION CRITERIA

Many members of the UFBA team told me they thought Lucas needs to implement a stricter application process to work in this project. Several researchers even ascribed their frustration with the project to the mild application process to enter the research project. No real criteria are set, some others argued, and therefore anyone could enter the project. “It should be like, I am not forcing you to join but if you want to do research within a community and therefore have impact on them, you have to live like them as well. At least for a little while”. Some opted that Lucas should select before letting people in the project. In that selection young researchers should explain their motivations, positioning and situating themselves and their aims. “In that way we can best ensure people on the team are really determined and committed to have a positive effect on the community” one other researcher said. Camilla confessed with a smile “But he cannot say no to anyone, he is too sweet”. For her it was not only the lack of criteria but most importantly the pace with which the project grew that was the real issue.

“The main problem with the project is the quick extension it went through” Camilla explained. I was reminded to my first meeting in the lab, and the fact that I had felt some resistance of Camilla and Ana towards me. Now I understood. Because of the fast pace, Camilla explained, there is not enough time

to really get to know one another, connect, relate and discuss the (initial) values of the project. Ana argued,

"So many new and different people, sometimes people whose ideals were more closely related to conventional biology principles. I think in the beginning the community really liked the project and felt close to it, at least great parts of the community. But then it started to become bigger and bigger being unbearable".

"It is impossible for Lucas, to check up on everybody in the field and notice all these differences. Even though he talks about participation in almost every meeting. I think he often does not perceive how he is being contradictory" Camilla said, referring to the fact that he talks about how important it is not to overload the community with researchers in a short time, but then in that same meeting, explains how a new researcher will have to do 150 interviews within a certain amount of time.

As Muhammed (2015) states, the question of who is on the research team can facilitate or hinder (or act in contradictory ways upon) the capacity to engage with CBPR community partners, affecting knowledge construction and research use, and ultimately impacting the goals of the research itself. Most ironically, in one of Lucas's articles of 2010 (El-Hani & Almeida, 2010), he acknowledges *"Even though this did not seem to disrupt affinitive trust, we are now attentive to the need to keep the team approximately in the size it has now, despite the putative attractiveness of new research proposals"*. Clearly, it was hard to stick to that intent on the long run.

6. CONCLUSION

"Critical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise theory becomes simply "blah, blah, blah," and practice, pure activism."

Freire (1998)

In this research I attempted to unravel the complexities of participatory research in Siribinha, by asking how the UFBA team engaged in participation, what factors shape the extent to which participation is possible (its participatory potential), and consequently what insight this brings for better grasping the complexities of participatory research. Due to my multifaceted methodological entanglement interchanging insider, outsider, and outsider-within roles with the UFBA team and the community of Siribinha, I gained unique insights about the complex challenges of a transdisciplinary research group to create more participatory, just and meaningful research in a university-community setting. In terms of theory, I gained insight into what conceptualization of decolonial and just participation can help guide participatory practices. At the same time, I have learned how highly conceptual critical theories risk working merely to advance theory, thereby overshadowing the need to instigate on ground practices that work more closely on the social reality. Methodologically, this study reveals how PAR processes and feminist methodologies can foster operative guidelines translating theory to the ground. The latter also brought about practical hands-on insights on developing human skills needed for this kind of work translated into recommendations below. Altogether, this case exemplifies how and why a research group with good intentions can have difficulty narrowing the rift between collaboration within the research group, and participating with the community, to the act of doing it.

Spaces where power dynamics take place in participatory research

Despite the substantial amounts of energy, time, and importance the UFBA team gives to participation practices, my study shows that without paying sufficient attention to interdependent spaces of power that reside in participatory research, it is hard to practice horizontal forms of participation elaborated upon in theory. These spaces of power (Muhammad et al., 2015) greatly synthesize part of my main findings; therefore, I use them to convey the answer to my research questions. These are the power of *the research process itself*, power regarding *positionality*, and *epistemological/ontological* power, shaping the participatory potential of such university-community engagements more generally. Additionally, the analysis of these spaces of power has brought about insight for how to deal with power on the ground.

Regarding power in the *research process* itself, the UFBA team had difficulty shifting the unequal power relations of ownership and agency over the process of research towards the community. Although some sub-projects were developed based on input from the community, a sense of shared ownership of the research by the community was found limited. However, these power sharing elements are essential for motivating the community to participate, facilitating empowerment, and enlarging their self-confidence in guiding the research processes. Yet, I found not the initial limited amount of agency and ownership is the biggest problem, but rather the insufficient attention and energy paid on the ground to afterwards shift power to the community, and openly talk about this aim with the community. As a result, only informing and communicating about the project, and its ultimate goals and ambitions in a way that the community could fully grasp, showed to be a great challenge to start with. This indicates how the community's agency in the research process and understanding of the research are intertwined.

Positionality revolves around researcher's identity, the position with the academy, and its relational position with other UFBA researchers and the community. I have found that the different way in which researchers are positioned greatly impacts the collaboration with the community of Siribinha and the collaboration within the UFBA team. Difference and commonalities regarding identities, privileges, social-political location, personal baggage and pre-determined assumptions heavily impact the potential for forging trustful relations, but were not openly discussed. Yet again, as is the case for power in the research process, it is instead the silence about these issues that showed to be most problematic, not the frictions themselves. This applies with regard to the relation to the community, and the relationships within the researchers group.

Interestingly, and connected to power in the research process, some sub projects tried to increase the community's agency, autonomy and empowerment by positioning themselves as an objective, impaired, and distant entities. However, I found the aspired distance to hinder rather than increase agency, and similarly found that close relationship elsewhere in the project encouraged more autonomy and agency. Close relationships of affection, care and trust appear to be indispensable for giving control and agency, as they are really powerful for shifting control and softening power structures that keep the ownerships of the research in the hands of academics. Therefore, this study shows how friction can be fertile soil for forging trust and building closer relationships. Researchers should not be afraid to voice that tension and put it out in the open, also when this dries difficult and sometimes uncomfortable conversations. It is somewhat impossible to politicize a dialogue or a relationship by depoliticizing your own role and position in it. Thus, to generate more horizontal and equitable relationship between university and community based on reciprocity, your position and socio-political location needs to be politicized. Because positionality is rather fluid than fixed there is an everlasting need to be reflexive over these dynamics and how they change throughout the project.

Looking at *epistemology*, my research shows that by acknowledging, discussing and questioning the power that resides in epistemologies, the UFBA has translated their respect for local epistemology from theory to practice to a great extent. It really is unique that a research group in such a context puts so much effort into sustaining constant dialogue about the power inequalities between university epistemology and local epistemology within the team and with the community. Here, the research group did exactly what they lacked doing sufficiently with regard to the research process and positionality as described above: they talked openly about it more. However, a tension was apparent between respecting the practiced epistemology of learning-by-doing of the community and integrating it in participative research design. On the one hand, the UFBA tries to express their admiration of local epistemological strategies towards the community, but on the other hand they do not practice the local epistemological strategies themselves in their efforts to communicate their research and consider the community as partners. While it is easy, in theory, to agree upon the conception that a local community ought to be (and can be) the driver of its own research, friction exists and often arises when the skills, drenched in values and beliefs of academic scholars emerge. As the community learns by doing, and the UFBA does not give them the chance to learn about the research by doing, the epistemological strategies so much admired are not lived to their full potential. This again, reinforces the lack of agency as explained above.

Thus, as PAR practitioners reckon, these different spaces where power in participatory research resides cannot be dealt with siloed from each other as they are inseparable and interdependent. One notion for how to deal with these spaces of power rings true for all three and is the simple but important crux of this thesis; to confront and grapple with these power spaces to motivate more horizontal and more substantial forms of participation, reflexive cycles are needed to focus on our relationships and their reciprocal nature. As obvious as it sounds, knowing that relations are essential does not automatically translate into behaving differently. Relational research where subjectivity, affection, care and trust are

developed are hard to establish if 'opening up' is not done from both sides. The case in Siribinha exemplifies how proximity, rather than impaired-ness or distance, and subjectiveness and personal experiences instead of neutrality and objectivity are essential for establishing reciprocal, affective, and trustful relationships with two-wayed social and emotional responsibility. These relationships are the best equipped to dismantle (at least to a degree) some of the inherent inequities of power in these spaces. It appears a greater necessity exists within the UFBA team to jointly engage in reflexive cycles and connect these reflections to the aims and practices of the research project. Much more dialogue with the community and within the UFBA team is needed to truly open up self-exploration and the ability to relate differently to each other.

Structural limiting factors

Besides the power dynamics within the three spaces of power, deep-seated hierarchical boundaries of academic culture and structural institutional limitations of the academy also complicated participative research. I found internalized beliefs on neutrality, academic criteria, academic procedures, and funding schemes to be conducive to ways to engage and organize research, shaping the participatory potential with the community to a significant degree. Moreover, the confines of predetermined roles in academia and the culture of competition and distrust that became apparent in the group, shows how power can be very much nested in these inequitable roles shaping the limited collaboration within the group. My findings show that internal collaboration within the team, and cultivating relationships of affect, care and trust are a prerequisites for collaboration with the community. Yet, collaborative research is all too often organizationally configured under these extreme temporal pressures and structural constraints and obstructing the chance of research to become more flexible, horizontal, relational. Indeed, this blind spot is a residue of technocratic control within academia that surfaces in transdisciplinary work in these settings on a regular basis. It seems mentally and institutionally so inherited that we cannot easily dispose of it, even when we want to do so.

As a researcher, you have to swim against the stream in extremely harsh conditions. You are often more rewarded for following the stream and writing a good paper about participation than you are for engaging in participation on the ground. And a stream in which funding procedures, criteria and other institutional processes strengthen and reinforce the stream's pace. Even if, new 'horizons' such as the Horizon 2020 Framework show to bring space to slowly make these structures and unwieldy institutional processes more responsive to the call to decolonize research, funding criteria and procedures change slowly. Most importantly, in some contexts as that of Brazil, these structures change for the worse in a political context hostile to science as a whole. One cannot, and should not, detach these issues in an analysis on participation. Ironically, while academic and institutional structures hamper the development of relationships of care, affection, trust and reciprocity, it is precisely developing these relationships (against these odds) that are the best vehicle to dilute the impacts of such structural and asymmetrical power dynamics on research.

Altogether, my study not only exposes what factors influence the extent of participation, but also sheds light on the complexity of participatory research and how to possibly better deal with it. In these complex research entanglements these deeper relationships can best equalize these spaces of power and they can best mitigate the more structural internal dynamics and conflicts present in communities that are challenging in and of themselves and can be exacerbated by the presence of a research groups. It is researching through these relations, and connections of affect that these interactions can become decolonizing, and more equitable. Last, deeper relations also best alleviate the inequitable power structures that are present within the academia and in university-community settings making such engagement become more resilient to deal with institutional limitations forced upon transdisciplinary projects with a participative aims.

Theory-practice gap in critical social theory

Yet, my findings have also spurred a more unique insight on the complexities of participatory research which sheds light on relation between critical social theory and participatory practices, more generally. Focus on critical but very conceptual theories on epistemologies and ontologies can obscure the actual participatory practices they aim to achieve in order to act on the social reality they aim to change. I followed a research team that is motivated by these wider critical theories on epistemologies of the south and plural ontologies. In many ways these more critical notions that attempt to positively influence the social reality of marginalized communities are reflected in how this group operates, how they engage internally and in their relation to the community. In fact, my own interest in this research and my way of engaging with it is partly inspired and informed by those conceptual critical debates. Similarly, the fact that my supervisor and Lucas have been excited and supportive about me researching the group, reflects a lot of that critical theoretical reasoning as well. Being willing to have me there is very much a reflection of that critical theoretical reasoning. Thus, there is a way in which all these critical and conceptual theorizing motivates better practices, and instigates being critically reflexive.

Hence, without diminishing the importance and relevance of these theoretical developments and how they have advanced more decolonial and meaningful science, it is obviously not sufficient. Researchers getting stuck in that theoretical mode often fail to actually create better participatory practices by not focusing enough on the embodied, relational and practical aspects needed. Increasing calls to decolonize science, its connection to society, and the role of knowledge in it have emphasized theoretical advances on 'epistemology' (de Sousa Santos, 2015) and 'ontology' (Blaser & De La Cadena, 2018; Pedersen and Viveiros de Castro, 2014). Yet, I find, the attention for these 'cool' sounding and sometimes somewhat ambiguous concepts risks becoming disconnected from the social reality and the social ambitions they try to achieve in the community, and can be inverted. To be clear, it is not the attention to these theoretical advances that is risky, rather the ease with which it substitutes more practical, embodied and relational focus on research. The overly focus on conceptual ideas about what decolonizing is, has made its inseparability for decolonizing the 'praxis' (Freire, 1979) indistinct. This praxis entails methodology and methods as a vehicle for doing theory in practice and vice versa. My experience shows that because PAR tackles all these aspects of power as intrinsically intertwined it can bring very useful insight and possible ways on how to engage with the muddled reality of this kind of research.

Critical theorizing might be important in motivating the move towards participation in the first place and give the needed background, but it has the risk to invert and actually become something that beclouds what needs to happen on the ground (e.g. focus on hanging out with the community and establishing deeper relationships of respect and trust, stepping out of the academic world, trying to take the concerns of the people they work with seriously, and putting their own research questions in the back). Also within these critical theories my findings show a theory-practice gap. I believe, this challenge is not particular to this research group but rather is a risk that lurks around the corner of many transdisciplinary research projects with participatory aims, especially in university-community contexts.

In the case of the UFBA, since the theorizing aspect is well captured, dealing with these issues has not so much to do with writing more eloquent papers on this gap, preaching about the importance of relationships in one-directional ways, or simply having more meetings to discuss trust. Similarly, this study has not so much value on paper if it does not instigate transformative actions such as cultivating deeper relationships and starting personal and common reflexive cycles. In this respect, the translation from theory to practice is very much out of the comfort zone for those academics that cling to their academic skills and academic ways of dealing with problems. The more your life is embedded in

advancing a career in the 'prison of academia' (for example when writing grants as a professor or publish articles as a PhD student), the harder it is to prioritize these relational engagements over academic responsibilities. Besides, not trained in this area of embodied (human) skills, some researchers might be somewhat helpless in this disposed context of the required rigorous self-reflective cycles. Therefore, time, attention, and care should be given to these moments of bonding and reflexivity.

My own experience, the way how I engaged with the community in Siribinha, and how questionable that might be in various ways, shows that even if one is conscious of these relations of power and the importance of relations of affect, knowing what to do and how to go forward is always scary, insecure, and messy in practice. As Smith et al., (2010) state, "Many of us have succeeded as graduate students and faculty members because we learned to approach tasks in an intellectualized manner, to be goal-oriented, and to assiduously move our projects forward to completion. These same tendencies can be the risk in participatory practices". In retrospect, I believe that despite my good intentions (as well as the UFBA team's intentions) I have sometimes valued outcomes over process. In the end, through these experiences, I have learned a lot about myself, research processes, academia, and my place within it. I realized that fully resolving the deep tensions and contradictions within these spaces is probably not feasible. During the last 1.5 years, I have seen important changes from the UFBA team and some have openly committed themselves to doing things differently in the future. For example, Lucas has come to reflect more in-depth on the political aspects of the project during his sabbatical with Boaventura do Santos Sousa, which has instigated the same reflection in other researchers in the lab. Yet, the lack of openness, trust, and communication in the group (especially the younger researchers) worries me. I feel attention must be drawn to the fact that one can only critically reflect jointly when trust and care are present among the team.

As with mangroves, it all looks beautiful from the outside. Mangroves inhabit the handy function of mediating the sea world from that of the land and integrating saltwater life with the freshwater life. The way how mangroves brings different worlds together is awesome. Still, it isn't until you truly get into the mangroves, like dona Carolina and many other fisherwomen, that you can start to unravel the answers to difficult questions they seem to hold hidden. Learning this beautiful reality is harsh as well because you easily get lost since the high roots disable your long sight. You might get stuck in the mangroves, and while being up in the mud until your knees, you will only go forward very slowly and with a lot of effort. I needed to find out for myself, got muddy, and even got stuck in these mangroves while doing meaningful work with the community as well. The UFBA team wants to engage with research taking a similar mediating role as a mangrove, and doing so in a bottom-up participatory manner. Yet, this integrating role seems all bright from the outside, but challenges may arise getting inside of these interactions. Power inequities might only show themselves when you are in the midst of them. This makes it difficult to mediate the different worlds that come to gather and even more in a participatory way. Still, instead of paralyzing and distancing ourselves because there is no clear 'right' decision to make, or our long-term sight is blocked, I believe we should go even deeper into the mangroves, even when this can be problematic, painful or awkward. Inevitably, participatory engagements in themselves are a risky and tumultuous peril, but yet promising and worthwhile if we understand there is no other way than to get deeply inside the mangroves, get stuck and dirty, get uncomfortable, and learn together even if it is hard to backcast or forecast the pathways forward.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Value the communities capacity for research as you value your academic colleagues, taking them as different but equal partners; at the same time aim to create a relationship of affect, care, trust and reciprocity with your colleagues as you aim with the community

members. After all, similar kind of interactions are needed for both types of collaboration, and one is dependent on the other.

- Organize activities, social gatherings, and games to start to talk about positionality, forge trust and learn to be open about motivations and goals of the research. This applies to within the UFBA team as with the community (although they might need different kind of approaches – more organically with the community – more organized within the researchers' team)
- Spending more time in the community just hanging around and building up relationships and connections, getting to know those that had led contact with the UFBA team so far and make new connections (especially researchers engaging in less (or non) participatory sub project should pay special attention to this)
- Invite more active members of the community into the UFBA and hire willing community members as local researchers so they better come to know where the researchers come from, and they better come to understand what research can do for them
- Try to limit the amount of new researchers, and if added to the group, make sure they align and discuss values before had with the rest of the group, and let them go along on a field trip before they establish their research topic.
- Starting new research sub-projects after relationships are strengthened and a sincere dialogue can come about to find research topics that the community considers as valuable.

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