

Qualitative Research: The Hermeneutic Circle and the Native Informant

Rakhmatou Kane

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Educational policy and practices have an impact on students and communities. In the same way, culture has bearing on educational policy and practice. In order to understand those circumstances, ethnographic research is critical. One has to understand a culture before one comprehends factors that may affect it. Ethnography is no longer exclusive to *outsiders*; more and more *insiders* are researching *their* own people.

In the knowledge construction that data collection, analysis, and interpretation entail, the hermeneutic circle appears to be paramount. This paper proposes to elucidate the hermeneutic circle in relation to the *native informant*. In so doing, the following questions will be answered. What is the hermeneutic circle? What are its expected outcomes? What relevance does being a native informant have in the hermeneutic circle? Can the native informant be *detached* enough to produce valid interpretations of meaning? The answers to those questions will be based on theory as well as interview data and field notes collected in spring 2002 as part of a study on the schooling of young girls, in Fouta Toro, a Muslim rural area in Senegal.

The fact of classifying concepts and people into categories reflects a need to *objectively* organize things in a way that will make it simple to decide what goes with what or who gets what treatment. While conducting *objective* studies, researchers use social categories that can be qualified as subjective. The researcher cannot claim total understanding; he or she can only make interpretations, which bear the mark of his or her subjectivity. In the endeavor of interpretation, the inquirer tends to make some categories more elastic than other groups. But once researchers have recognized their subjectivity, they can interact, listen, interpret, relate, while keeping in mind that text is not flawless; it is only true to a certain extent. By telling lived or quasi-lived experiences, the researcher

tells the reader contextualized, historical, political occurrences that can only be interpreted within their contexts.

Qualitative methodology stresses “the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 8). The researcher cannot claim to be entirely objective while listening to and interacting with participants; the inquirer’s background has a great impact on what is studied. It also has bearing on how the research will be conducted. Last but not least, the researcher's subjectivity determines what will be understood, and how findings will be presented.

Within the qualitative framework, research is more often than not conducted through conversation. Hermeneutics considers a real conversation to be “... an extended and open dialogue which presupposes a background of intersubjective agreements and a tacit sense of relevance” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 2). The hermeneutic circle allows comprehension between the researcher and the participant while both are involved in knowledge construction. It is based on the conception that “in order to understand the part (the specific sentence, utterance, or act), the inquirer must grasp the whole (the complex[ity] of intentions, beliefs, and desires of the text, institutional context, practice, form of life, language game, and so on), and vice versa” (Schwandt in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 193).

To demonstrate the preponderance of the whole over its parts, Ulin gives the example of translation. Before translating a text from one language to another, the individual needs to have an idea of what a text is about since the whole has bearing on how specific parts will be interpreted. In the same way, the parts help determine the meaning of the whole (Ulin, 2001, p. 112).

It goes without saying that anticipations are not always accurate. More often than not the translator’s conception of the whole changes after the translation of the parts has been completed. But “the correction of anticipations does not contribute to their elimination

but rather to their reformulation, from which further questions to be asked or problems to be researched can be articulated” (Ulin, 2001, p. 112). In effect, Ulin concludes, “[i]t is precisely the fact that anticipations can be corrected dialectically which prevents hermeneutics from being a vicious circle” (Ulin, 2001, p. 112). Both the translator’s and the researcher’s conceptions are more often than not corrected in accordance with the components of the whole. Those anticipations or *prejudices* “...are neither suspended nor dogmatically maintained but are corrected or modified through the dialectical movement of understanding in the relationship of part to whole” (Ulin, 2001, p. 112).

The basic premise of hermeneutic deconstruction is that, as Gadamer (1976) asserts, understanding is universal; nothing is beyond understanding. In the same way, in order for understanding to be possible, the person needs to be open to the thing to be understood. In conversation, what matters is not to understand the person, but to comprehend the content of someone's words. Interlocutors need to be involved; they must feel the need to have the conversation for it to be successful. In effect, understanding “...is participative, conversational, and dialogic. It is always bound up with language and is achieved only through a logic of question and answer” (Schwandt in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 195).

Understanding would be impossible without a means of communication; conversation would be out of the question without language as a vehicle. But can language convey meaning properly? Derrida (1998) wonders whether the speaker owns the language or if it is the language that owns the individual. In fact, the subtleties of language and the differences in the same dialect (everyone speaks his or her own, unique idiom) make it impossible for language to be a reasonable instrument. When we are talking we try to use a language that our listener understands. Therefore we always use the other’s language, not our own (see Derrida, 1998, pp. 9-10). In the same way, while in the field, the researcher uses his or her participants’ languages.

Additionally, language seems to hold the ambivalent role of easing human relations and complicating them. In this respect, Hendricks (in Hendricks and Oliver, 1999) contends,

most languages contain metaphors that pertain to male dominance. If we agree with the rhetorical point of view that language is a tool that allows us to negotiate the world, then oppressed groups, be they women or racial/ethnic minorities, need to find ways to convey their views without using those metaphors.

Language can be used to *liberate* since thought comes prior to enunciation. The speaker has the idea before uttering or writing it, no matter how long or short the time lapse between the two occurrences. Further, the presence of the unsaid in discourse is undeniable; understanding can be considered impossible without that *unsaid*. The mere knowledge of a language is insufficient for a grasp of that *unsaid*, or rather the *already said*. In order for comprehension to be attainable both the speaker and the listener need to situate themselves within the same frame. According to Foucault (1972), text is secretly based on an *already said*, which can be a *never said*. In one's discourse, one can either validate or reject that *already said*, but one should not and cannot ignore it.

Language constitutes a link between individuals and communities; it is "... the medium of all understanding and all tradition. And language is not to be understood as an instrument or tool that we use; rather it is the medium in which we live." (Bernstein, 1983, p. 145). In fact the adage "you are what you say" shows the preponderance of language. The way in which we express ourselves is influenced by our socio-cultural circumstances. In the same way, the listener's background affects his or her understanding. "Every such world, as linguistically constituted, is always open, of itself, to every possible insight and hence for every expansion of its own world picture, and accordingly available to others" (Gadamer, 1975, quoted in Ulin, 2001, p. 117).

But as Gadamer (1976) contends, the effective conversation is never the one we wanted to have. We never know what will arise in a conversation. That is why qualitative researchers find it hard to determine methods prior to being in the field (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). The comprehension of a language entails and is dependent on familiarity with the culture in question. As Gadamer (1975) contends, reason is influenced by tradition. The Western researcher cannot set aside the paradigm according to which he or

she was raised; in the same way, the native researcher cannot disregard his or her set of beliefs, values and so forth, while trying to understand some of the very social constructs that characterize his or her milieu. In fact, according to Gadamer (1975), tradition constitutes “legitimate authority”. “Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms, i.e. it is not its own master, but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates” (Gadamer, 1975, quoted in Ulin, 2001, p. 109). Familiarity with a paradigm allows one to understand parts of it. The point is not to obey tradition, but to *know* about it. Tradition is “...not opposed to freedom or knowledge but actually becomes a legitimate medium through which one can realize freedom” (Ulin, 2001, p. 111).

One is connected to tradition, the same way one is linked to language. In fact, “...human action is meaningful by virtue of the system of meanings to which it belongs” (Schwandt in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, pp. 192-193). In the same way, text (written or spoken) “is meaningful by virtue of the system of meanings to which it belongs”. Yet *distance* allows the individual to *objectify* something and understand it. In fact, to “...have a ‘world’ means to have an attitude towards it. To have an attitude towards the world, however, means to keep oneself so free from what one encounters of the world that one is able to present it to oneself as it is” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 402, quoted in Ulin, 2001, p. 116). Even though the definition of the object is subjective, it is only defined or described as perceived; one should not lose oneself in a sea of traditions with the pretext that those are unavoidable.

Therefore understanding assumes detachment. The concept of *othering* appears to be unavoidable in that process. Yet, the individual and the object can be one. The question that thus arises is how do we distance ourselves from ourselves. In this respect, the person carries several voices, not just one. Listening to oneself also means listening to “the other”. The other, the listener, is nothing but one of the many voices within ourselves. For instance listening to a friend also means listening to oneself (because the individual and his or her friends have certain aspects in common). In this respect, Collins (1990) contends, a “... primary epistemological assumption underlying the use of

dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process” (p. 212).

Hermeneutics as a philosophy allows self-inquiry beyond social inquiry. The hermeneutic circle permits the individuals to listen, question, and ponder, all in the dialogue. While we strive to understand our social contexts, we also need to understand ourselves. The social constructs that we are trying to understand are likely to have been so much ingrained in the social fabric that we have not escaped from them; we are they. As an actor of the social process, the individual is also an agent in the understanding course, not just a spectator or an observer. Yet, Kerdeman (1998), as quoted by Schwandt in Denzin and Lincoln (2000) supports, an “...interpreter’s self-understanding neither affects nor is affected by the negotiation of understanding. Indeed insofar as interpreters and linguistic objects are presumed to be distinct, self-understanding is believed to bias and to distort successful interpretation” (p. 194). There appears to be two problems with that statement.

First the distinctness between *interpreter* and *linguistic objects* is not obvious. Those *linguistic objects* help make of individuals what they are; we negotiate the world through those objects. In addition, comprehending social factors entails understanding the self since one needs to be conscious of the conditions of understanding itself if one is trying to figure out the *why* of things. Secondly distinctness does not necessarily preclude association. The moment we distinguish one thing from another, we are also linking one to the other. If one feels the need to state that “X is not Y” one is also accepting similarities or relations between X and Y. Moreover, knowledge of the self happens as the interpreter attempts to comprehend objects. In this respect Gadamer talks about the *fusion of horizons*, which “... is a dialectical process through which, as I come to know the cultural object in its radical otherness, I also come to know myself as a historically finite being” (Ulin, 2001, p. 114).

Therefore knowledge of the self should not be considered a hindrance to knowledge of the object. On the one hand, knowledge of the self may be accidental; one learns about

oneself while trying to learn about objects. On the other hand, the inquirer has *separated* him or herself from the object the moment he or she *objectifies* it. In addition, knowledge of the self indirectly means better vision of the other. In fact if distinction from self and object needs to be clarified, knowledge of one can only lead to better knowledge of the other.

But interpretation is considered to entail a certain level of detachment from the setting. Yet is detachment possible at all? Does *detachment* from one setting not involve *attachment* to another? Can the inquirer be neutral? In this respect, Mudimbe (1988) rejects structuralism and other genres that claim scientific objectivity; he reclaims the significance of the *subject*, who, in the knowledge construction endeavor, starts from a given set of assumptions, conceptions and beliefs. In effect, the entire field of anthropology depends upon the Western *frame*, the system of thought without which the discipline would not exist. Mudimbe suggests that representation is a political endeavor, whether or not the *representer*, meaning the artist, the anthropologist, or simply the researcher intends it to be so. Interpretation is subjective; it can be altered depending on the interpreter's new experiences (including other interpretations of the same actions or texts). Regardless of how cautious and meticulous one is, the knowledge constructed can always be improved. Moreover, the chances of interlocutors' repeating the same conversation on the same topic are minimal. As said earlier, conversation is unpredictable.

In the enterprise of knowledge construction, the researcher uses *experience-near* concepts to construct knowledge with *experience-distant* concepts (Geertz, 1983). "An experience-near concept is, roughly, one that someone (...) might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied by others. An experience-distant concept is one that specialists of one sort or another (...) employ to forward their scientific, philosophical, and practical aims" (Geertz, 1983, p. 57). The jargon that is used in the scholarly world is not necessarily intelligible in the research setting and vice versa.

Yet, using *experience-near* concepts to construct knowledge with *experience-distant* concepts, amounts to putting oneself *in someone else's skin* (Geertz, 1983). The importance of the relationship between the researcher and the *understood* may lead to the contention that being a native to a culture is essential if one is to study its ways. Still, Geertz contends, the researcher does not have to be a native in order to understand one. In fact, some may view the non-native's interpretations as more objective –therefore more valid–than the native's since interpretation entails detachment from the setting. In this respect, the moral value of a principle transcends the context that produced that principle. The artist, the researcher, is *human* before being cultural or contextualized. In fact, it is *humanness* that renders that *contextualization* possible. But if reflexivity does not preclude detachment, and if knowledge of the self does not hinder comprehension of the object, the native's assessment is just as valuable as the non-native's, if not more so.

Even though I (the researcher) am to some extent different from the participants to my study, I shall take the stance of *a friend*. What connects me to the group that I use as an example is the primary reason I chose the setting. I can claim to understand, and to be understood by the people whose words I interpret in this paper. Some may contest the claim that I belong to that community insofar as geographically I do not live *there*. But that does not change the fact that I feel connected to the participants more than I do people anywhere else (including the small town where I grew up). Being conscious of certain differences between the participants and me does not hinder the ties that connect me to the setting. In fact I am connected to my collaborators because I was raised with the same basic values and principles as most of them; I am also *colonized* the way they are. We have been subjected to a language and/or culture that is not our own.

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher relies on observation and communication with participants. Communication and observation are inseparable from positionality, which determines the way he or she interacts with the participants. Being *immersed* in a community can be as problematic as being an outsider. One needs to find a niche where one can evaluate oneself and others, as well as social interactions without being buried in social interactions.

As a native informant, I can claim to have a certain level of familiarity with the setting, some knowledge of the participants that allow me to comprehend meaning and make relevant interpretation of participants' views. In addition I can engage freely in dialogue with respondents without being overly cautious about what is acceptable or what is not. I can even afford to *question* some of the conceptions presented to me.

Immersion appears to be paramount in the hermeneutic circle, since it renders questioning possible. In fact the hermeneutic circle can be considered to be incomplete if *questioning* does not occur. One can hardly deal with any type of *circle* without some reciprocity. It is *reciprocity* that makes of the hermeneutic circle a *circle*. For instance, the listener makes meaning of participants' views through what he or she knows about the cultural paradigm with reference to which those perceptions were enunciated. Then he or she presents that meaning back to the respondent as a statement or a question since what our dialogue partner says is not always clear and exempt of ambiguities. While the listener is striving to comprehend texts, the speaker is forced to have a better perception of his or her own views. That happens for instance when one is asked to explain what one has always taken for granted.

But immersion may hinder objective observation since observation requires some distance. Yet observation becomes synonymous to reflection when one is more often than not busy taking part in dialogue and conversation. In effect, reflection can be considered an extension of the conversations that one has had with participants; only, in observation, one talks to oneself as opposed to sharing with others. After an observation has been made, one may choose to share it or keep it to oneself.

In this respect, one of the observations that I made while engaging in dialogue with participants is that marriage is a hindrance to the schooling of girls the same way education constitutes a delaying factor when it comes to matrimony. Even though the schooling of girls is considered important, one cannot but note the urgency that parents put on marriage. For instance, the parents support that if their daughters are interested in boys, they will give them away for marriage. What is odd about the contention is that

while twelve-year-old-girls' *seeing* boys may be considered an irreversible occurrence, a child is considered "moist clay" that one can "mold" in the way one wishes. As one of the participants supports, "...Education starts with the child because it is moist clay... It is easy to mold moist clay, if you build it you can get whatever you want".

Yet, if the "moist clay" is interested in males, the parents imply, or rather if grown men show interest in that "moist clay", nothing can be done to change the situation. None of the parents said that they encouraged their daughters to study and discouraged them from "being interested in boys" until they reach a certain age or a certain grade level. In fact parents appear to be more "interested" than their daughters; as a few mothers noted, marriage "is all they [parents] think about"; that is why they prioritize matrimony over education.

I did not share that particular observation with my participants because I judged that it would put them on the defensive. Moreover, I do not know what it feels like to have children; I do not fully comprehend the apprehensions that parents may experience with respect to their daughters. In order to maintain the level of trust that already existed between me and participants, I needed to set a limit that my *questioning* and *challenging* would not go past. Moreover, one may retort to the contention that parents favor marriage over education that education is not more valuable than marriage. Why should parents prioritize the former over the latter? Another point that one may make is that marriage does not necessarily preclude education. Be that as it may, social constructs in the area are such that parents prioritize marriage and view it as a success in and of itself. Pondering and questioning led to that realization. While the dialogue with participants may have been interrupted at some point, that interruption can be viewed as necessary; otherwise the hermeneutic circle would be a *vicious circle*.

Another characteristic that I observed in the field is that patriarchy is so deeply ingrained in the social fabric that more often than not, the individual, male or female, does not question certain aspect of the community that pertain to the system. A wife is to obey her husband regardless of the actions in which the latter engages. In this respect, JaBDo

epitomizes what is perceived as the perfect wife in communities such as Fouta Toro. JaBDo is about twenty-four years of age. Her husband of seven years just married a second wife at another village. Yet, JaBDo's husband is not exactly what can be called a good provider for his family. The couple has two children, one of whom is very sickly, probably from lack of proper nutrition.

While aware of the situation, some of the women seem to blame JaBDo for not "having enough milk" for her infants. They would say "no one can afford to buy formula all the time! A woman should be able to nurse her children!" I replied to one of them, "How did you get the milk you fed your children? Maybe you should tell JaBDo so that she can do the same thing." Obviously I was just trying to make her acknowledge that JaBDo may have been unfortunate, but she was not to blame for something over which she had no control. Seeing the point that I was trying to make, my interlocutor just said: "Maybe she should stop having children...this is the village we just cannot afford formula!" What is ironic about this discussion is that it is a woman supporting a man's unkind behavior towards another woman. Marrying another wife hardly appears to be a solution to the couple's problem, but a *good* wife is expected to endure more than she is allowed to contest.

Some may view my concerns as motivated by *false consciousness*; in other words I may be seeing a problem where there is none. The basis for that contention is that every society has its norms. One should not use one social paradigm to judge another one. Yet, a society that holds that it cannot improve, or that it should not learn from others, is bound to regress. It goes without saying that other cultures may find a few things to learn from communities such as those of Fouta Toro; in the same way, the named area or any community for that matter should not strive to conserve all of its values regardless of the costs. My contention is that tradition is only valuable if it does not impede human development. Yet, not believing in a tradition that pertains to one's cultural background may position one as an *outsider*.

Critiques can question the validity of the researcher's voice regardless of whether or not he or she is from the same environment as the people being studied. Imam et al. (1997) stress that African researchers, especially the ones who are involved in rural studies, are often questioned because they are thought of as being *westernized*. Being from an environment does not guarantee that the researcher knows the people she or he is researching. The question that arises is the following. What parameters does one use to define *Africanness*? It goes without saying that answering that question is quasi impossible. The crucial issue consists in the dilemma of being both an *insider* and an *outsider*. On the one hand, the researcher is an insider if he or she is familiar with the culture being studied; he or she is a community member in the same way as participants. On the other hand, the researcher represents academia. In fact, "every researcher speaks from within a distinct *interpretive community*, which configures, in its special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act" [italics added] (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 23). Moreover, the *insider/outsider* may consider him or herself to be nothing but another exploiting colonizer. The *colonizing* inquirer tends to define a problem *for* the people studied and, in some cases, to give solutions.

More than being an advocate for students, researchers can turn into advocates for themselves. In this regard, the autobiographical is more and more used in social science. As *minority* researchers, Dunbar (1999) and Villenas (1996) recount their experiences in ways that tell more about themselves than it does their informants. Dunbar worked with teenage African American alternative school students and Villenas studied Latina women. Both researchers came to a major realization while doing research. Dunbar (1999) experiences a moment of helplessness when one of his subjects was prematurely sent to prison. The system was such that he could not intervene, or so he felt. The all-powerful judge did not acknowledge the author; therefore what the latter felt or thought must not have mattered to the former. After all he was just a *black* man in a courtroom.

While Villenas (1996) asserts that she will not be silent in the future, that she will no longer be the *colonizer*, Dunbar (1999) *knows* he will never be the same. But to what

extent is he now a different individual is unclear. Is he different because he now knows that he will have to act the next time he faces a similar situation? Dunbar tells the reader about the anger he felt, but he did not manifest his anger in the *social* context. Is *academia* the only safe place where the researcher can voice his or her opinions? Is academia a refuge for the writer, just like poetry or other artistic genres of expression are for artists? Is research an art, a commitment, or both? If the individual is convinced that there is something wrong with a system and does nothing about it, one wonders whether there is a difference between the state of awareness and that of ignorance. The researcher can limit him or herself to describing social factors (again what should be considered enough description, how involved is the researcher in that endeavor?). But when the inquirer engages in hermeneutical deconstruction, he or she is part of the process, not a *spectator*.

“...[I]n a sense all social research is a form of *participant* observation, because, we cannot study the social world without being part of it...” [emphasis added] (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 111). Naturally, in his silence, Dunbar is still a *participant* to the extent that he is validating the very system he attacks in his writing. Still Dunbar may not have had to act since he was a *stranger* in the environment with which he dealt. When it comes to the *native informant*, he or she cannot afford to be silent when facing certain situations. In fact, regardless of the research endeavor, the native informant is first and foremost a community member.

In their research endeavors, Dunbar (1999) and Villenas (1996) have come to improve their knowledge of themselves. That consciousness makes of them *changed* individuals. By trying to understand others and social phenomena, both have achieved greater perception of themselves. That self-awareness cannot be considered an impediment to the knowledge of objects. As said earlier, knowledge of the self is likely to have a positive effect on knowledge of objects since observation and understanding require *othering*, which better perception of the self should render easier.

Be that as it may, the autobiographical enterprise does not really have meaning outside a given context. In fact the context should be prioritized over the individual since the self is only a self in relation to others. To some extent, autobiography as method may be considered inadequate since “the figuring out of experience brings something to experience that goes beyond the self as the source of legitimation” (Gordon, 2001, p. 4). In the same way, and for the reasons previously mentioned, the self cannot be dismissed from the research endeavor.

Being a *native informant* ambivalently positioned me both as *colonizer* and *colonized*, where “in the very confrontation of complicity and critique,...the object too is transformed” (Ganguly, 2001, p. 28). In effect, “the agenda of inquiry ought to be less about defending the nativist credentials of the representer... than about staking out the preponderance of the object...” (Ganguly, 2001, p. 28). Yet the object cannot be totally differentiated from the subject. Even the definition of the object itself bears the mark of the researcher's subjectivity. The significance of the object does not dismiss the importance of the inquirer's experiences because those help shape the object. *Colonized* as I am, when I go to the field, I may be perceived as a *colonizer*. In fact, the mere fact of asking questions about the schooling of young girls could position me on the *colonizer* standpoint if the individual to whom I am talking, because of certain traditional values, did not believe in educating girls.

As a *native informant*, I am also conscious of the impact that the West has had on me; the mere fact of accepting the status of *native informant* betrays Western effect. That influence, some may say, hinders proper understanding of the African milieu. But there are two problems with the latter argument. First, the original, or pure African is still to be defined. Having undergone centuries of invasions and exploitation, the continent has also suffered cultural imperialism, which does not leave people untouched. Secondly, I did not approach the villagers with the intention to *Westernize*. On the contrary, I went to the village with the intention to learn; I encouraged respondents to talk about issues that might impede or encourage education. I used a Western-based epistemology –namely hermeneutics–but that did not render me a Westerner. During de-colonization, some

African intellectuals were blamed for using Western weapons to fight the West, “and instead of winning, they had ended up sounding like the enemy they were supposed to have been fighting” (Munene, 2002, p. 5). While I did not exactly *fight* anyone in this paper, I exposed some of the conceptions and practices that are taken for granted and which may impede the education of young girls. Using a Western-based epistemology may have affected my judgment, but in the same way, the West has had an impact on the participants to my study. I am colonized, which they also are, even though to a lesser extent.

Choosing the methods for research is not always an easy task. Method is accompanied by a political position, which the researcher may or may not acknowledge. The hermeneutic circle assumes the existence of a whole and that of parts. The former is considered to have a great impact on the latter. At the same time, understanding of parts is considered to lead to better comprehension of the whole.

Even though understanding is within one’s reach, that does not make it inevitable. Whether or not the researcher is a native informant, he or she can only approach meaning within certain limits. Once we have accepted our position, we can interpret text within our boundaries. Belonging to the same cultural paradigm as one’s participants can facilitate understanding; but it also can make it less attainable insofar as proximity may hinder freedom.

Yet certain social constructs will only come to light through dialogue, which is facilitated through familiarity with the linguistic paradigm. Hence, being a native informant can be considered paramount to the hermeneutic circle in the same way the hermeneutic circle is critical to the individual who is doing research on his or her people.

References

- Bernstein, R. J. (1983). *Beyond Objectivism And Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, And Praxis*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black Feminist Thought, Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. London: HarperCollins Academic.
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y. S. Eds. (1998). *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Derrida, J. (1998). *Monolingualism of the Other, or the Prosthesis of Origin* (P. Mensale Trans.) Stanford: Stanford University Press (Original work published 1996).
- Dunbar, C. (1999). Three Short Stories. *Qualitative Inquiry* 5, 1, 130-140.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (A. M. Sheridan Smith Trans.) New York: Pantheon Books (Original work published 1969).
- Gadamer, H. -G. (1976). *Verité et méthode: Les grandes lignes d'une hermeneutique philosophique*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
- Ganguly, K. (2001). *States of Exception: Everyday Life and Postcolonial Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Geertz, C. (1983). *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gordon, Lewis (2000). *A Problem of Biography in Africana Thought and Existential Borders of Anonymity and Superfluous Invisibility*. *Existencia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought*. New York: Routledge.
- Imam, A., Mama, A. and Sow, F. (1997). *Engendering African Social Sciences*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Mudimbe, V. Y. (1988). *The Invention of Africa, Gnosis, Philosophy, and The Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Munene, Macharia (2002). *Africans and Intellectual Adventurism: East African Intellectual Warriors*. Paper prepared for the Development of African Studies Seminar Series, Center for African Studies. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

- Ulin, R. (2001). *Understanding Cultures: Perspectives in Anthropology and Social Theory*. 2nd edition. Malden: Blackwell
- Villenas, S. (1996). The Colonizer/Colonized Chicana Ethnographer: Identity, Marginalization, and Co-optation in the Field. *Harvard Educational Review* 66, 4, 711-731.