Notes and Reflections on *Say it Forward, Then and Now*
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I. Reworking the material:

As I began to consider referring to a project that has already taken place in the summer of 2018, I had several goals and ideas in mind: first, I was somewhat concerned about creating a project *for* the context of an academic assignment. *Say it Forward* was conceived as an experiment in creative engagement with our surroundings, and as a response to the some of the ongoing social and political processes in Neukölln, the way we understand them of course. Working towards a representation and documentation of everyday life with the neighborhoods' youth and from their own point of view was the ends we defined for this project, not a means—which I found more compatible with the critical attitudes reflected in the course's readings, as well as my own approach to ethical research and/or activism. Going through the recordings again I felt almost astounded, once more, by how clear-sighted they often were about their position within these processes and the extent to which they were able to locate them in their experiences. When we set out to conduct such a project, we conceptualized it as one that explores feelings and emotions, hoping that this kind of emphasis on the particular and experiential levels *might* offer access to different—more structural—dimensions of the everyday (Kilomba 2019). The result was certainly educational for us, too, as some of what they produced in testimony, commentary or inquiry cut directly to the core of many issues (displacement, policing, racism, identity and belonging, etc.), to an extent we did not necessarily expect from a group of kids aged 9-13.

II. The unstable grounds of identity and positionality:

Another consideration in deciding to rework the material was it being simply a good opportunity to try and give it a second 'run', coming up with a format that the participants could perhaps find interesting enough to revisit their work through, the things they chose to share and highlight in their experiences. One point that deserves emphasis when looking back on the conversations had on and off record throughout the two-week workshop period, is the instability of clearly delimited definitions of identity and position. What makes one a German? Who is a citizen, and what does citizenship mean in terms of full social and political participation, how long does it take to get there—if at all possible? Many of the kids were born in Germany to parents who were work-migrants or refugees; others arrived as infants and learned German along with whatever language was spoken at home. While they sometimes felt the need to qualify their claims for equal treatment in terms that reflected the binaries of the dominating discourses on who is German and who isn't (El-Tayeb 2016), in other moments they seemed to navigate the third space they inhabit with is, as reflected in the every-day

negotiations of their place and rights. One of the girls shared an anecdote from school, where she was asked by a teacher to change her land of origin from 'Palestine' to 'Israel' in a written essay on her family, to which she refused. When asked why, she said that although she has never been to that place, it is where her parents and relatives and many friends or neighbors came from, and therefore it is a part of who she is, and she has a right to say that at school, on the street, or anywhere.

The question of inhabiting multiple spaces in ways that complicate hardline categorization was also relevant in reflecting our own position as the organizing crew. We were five women, all minorities in our respective societies except one, largely of working-class background. And yet we created this project as newcomers, living in Neukölln for a mere few years as part of the gentrification process of the past decade, working with young people who demographically represent those who are being gradually pushed out. Looking back at how we tried to manage what at times felt quite contradictory, I factor in come useful critical notions that challenge the dichotomies of insider/outsider and oppressor/oppressed while working in certain settings (Dinesh 2016).

Chilisa (2012) looks to such principles as personal experience in Chicana feminist epistemology as well as the significance of action-oriented work to fit community needs in Africana/Black methodologies, and Smith (2012) elaborates on approaches to representation and reframing of indigenous issues that assume the agency of community members and their ability to define and direct their own projects. In *Say it Forward,* we attempted a collaborative framework where the kids can author their stories within a program we created, informed by our personal and situated experiences which—though different—did facilitate understanding and trust. As our relationship continues, we hope to find more ways to jointly contribute to the fabric of the neighborhood.

Related Readings

Chilisa, Bagele. 2012. *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE
    Publications.
Dinesh, Nandita. 2016. *Theatre and War: Notes from the Field*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
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    m/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&AN=1357200.
El-Tayeb, Fatima. 2016. *Undeutsch: Die Konstruktion Des Anderen in Der Postmigrantischen
    Gesellschaft*. Xtexte. Bielefeld: Transcript.
Kilomba, Grada. 2019. *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism*. Münster: UNRAST-
    Verlag.
Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 2012. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.
Second edition. London: Zed Books.