ETHICS IN SMALL ISLAND RESEARCH:

Reflexively navigating multiple relations

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ABSTRACT: This article concerns research ethics in small, insular communities such as islands and other locales islanded by topography and/or isolation. Using the Faroe Islands as case, the point of departure is a discussion of how islanders navigate multiple relations and how this might impact research ethics. Because relations in such island/islanded communities can be highly interwoven and complex, this article argues for a situated research ethics that is grounded in multiple relations. Most research ethics codes are grounded in Western individualist thought, conceived outside the social sciences and in non-island settings. Furthermore, they may fail to take adequate account of the social interconnectedness, interdependency, and intimacy, which can prevail in small island/islanded communities. Using the concept of reflexive navigation, the article presents a research ethics that encompasses a relational ethics. In doing to, a framework of ethical reflexive navigation is proposed which can support researchers and island research institutions. Within the relational ethics framework, the ethical qualities of attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness are applied to research in island/islanded communities.

KEYWORDS: Island/islanded communities, research ethics, multiple relations, reflexive navigation, relational ethics

Introduction

> *I was sitting across the table from the gentleman I was about to interview. We were in his living room on a southern island of the Faroe Islands. Prior to our meeting I had, over the phone and in writing, provided information concerning the research, my role in the project, as well as my position at the University of the Faroe Islands. As we sat over coffee, I revisited the research and provided as much information as I deemed necessary. We discussed ongoing consent, confidentiality, how his input would be used in the research and so on. As I sensed that we had discussed the project sufficiently, I asked if we should start the interview. He promptly replied: "Before we start, I need to know who I am talking to. Your surname, where is it from? What family are you of?"*
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> Author's fieldnotes, February 2019

This introductory quote, a common experience in the Faroe Islands, exemplifies the interconnectedness of relations, and how public and private spheres are blended and oftentimes impossible to separate. My informant is actively withholding consent to

participate based on my professional identity and institutional affiliation alone. In the first instance, therefore, the quote reveals something about smallness and insularity of the Faroe Islands. My informant is reflexively navigating (a term I return to later) in a society characterised by multiple relations. The quote, furthermore, reveals how discourses of ethics and consent are grounded in individualism (Barrett & Parker, 2003; Israel, 2014) and might therefore, not take account of the relational realities of small island/islanded communities. In negotiating consent, as in the fieldnote extract above, my informant is engaging in a form of personal protection. The researcher–informant relation in this situation blurs into the private sphere on the basis that Faroese navigate primarily on who you *are*, rather than your professional identity. In other words, navigating means that people are emplaced in family, kinship and social networks (Gaffin, 1996; Gaini, 2013; Hayfield & Schug, 2019; Leonard, 2016). With this in mind, I argue that the intensity of multiple relations in the Faroe Islands – and which also may prevail in other small island/islanded communities – calls for a relational ethics.

This article discusses how multiple relations implicate research ethics in small, physically bounded communities, such as islands or other locales islanded by features of topography and/or isolation (such as remote valleys, 'outports' in Newfoundland, remote villages in Greenland, etc.). I take 'small' to refer to smallness in terms of population, and throughout this article I refer to these places as small island/islanded communities. In such places, conceptualisations of the self in relation to others are invariably context dependent. Therefore, I do not assume all small island/islanded communities are the same. Neither do I assume islanders to be disconnected from the outside world. On the contrary, they are active participators and contributors in a globalised world. Nevertheless, high levels of familiarity, a lack of anonymity, multiple roles and social transparency are likely to intensify due to being small *and* islanded (Anckar, 2006). In other words, although not a determining factor, islandness contours "social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant, ways" (Baldacchino, 2004, p. 278) – in comparison to, for instance, an urban close-knit community in which a five-minute bus journey may render people anonymous, or a village in close proximity to urban areas with large populations; although multiple relations may also exist in such places.

Within Islands Studies it has been argued that, epistemologically, the implications of a lack of anonymity on small islands can entail "truths may go unspoken or counter-narratives unexplored" (Matheson et al., 2020, p. 720). From an ethics perspective, others have argued for the use of context-specific approaches, addressing positionalities, critical reflexivity, and non-colonial perspectives (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019; Grydehøj et al., 2021; Kydd-Williams, 2019; Nimführ & Otto, 2020; Potiki, 2016). The crux of these arguments involves addressing power and hierarchies of voices in research (including islander/non-islander; white Western/Indigenous). These discussions underline reflexive awareness in island research and, therefore, ethics are often embedded within these studies. However, arguments of voice, research ethics with Indigenous islanders and epistemologies of islands, important as these are, tend to dominate ethical dimensions of island discussions.

As a core concept in qualitative research, reflexivity "points in the same direction as standard research ethics" (Gillam & Guillemin, 2018, p. 267) and may reveal potential harm arising from smallness and multiple relations. Reflexivity, however, comes in various forms (Finlay, 2002), frequently embedded in methods to sensitise and bring about a heightened awareness by researchers – commonly in the form of self-awareness (Pillow, 2010). Moreover, as islanders navigate everyday life, mundane practices are "skilfully employed [and it] does not mean that we can take for granted that any member can describe in detail

how this is being done" (Ryen, 2008, p. 457). Said differently, people in island/islanded communities may be so accustomed to skilfully navigating interconnected relations, that social harm may not be apparent, despite reflexive research. Therefore, I suggest there is still room for discussions of research ethics.

In this article, I consider how researchers in small island/islanded communities, and their associated institutions, can advance island sensitive research ethics through a critical approach to research ethics – 'critical' in the sense of questioning Western individualistic procedural ethics and emphasising situated ethics. Using the Faroe Islands as case, I examine how Faroe Islanders navigate multiple relations, to subsequently suggest how researchers and research institutions can incorporate such/similar realities into ethics.

There are three main reasons to widen the discussion of multiple relations to research ethics. Firstly, when carrying out research in islands/islanded communities, researchers themselves are (or can become) enmeshed in multiple relations, in the present and future. Their position as researchers is blurred with private networks. Secondly, island research would benefit from adopting a relational approach to ethics. Protection from harm (physical, psychological, and social) implies that multiple relations and social intimacy are actively integrated into situated research ethics, also at institutional level. Lastly, research institutions in island/islanded jurisdictions should be cautious of research ethics guidelines, usually rooted in Western bioethics, which I return to later (Gray et al., 2017; Israel, 2014), especially as these are skewed towards large societies in which anonymity is possible. Concretely, this article asks: How can researchers and research institutions in small island/islanded communities integrate and practice island sensitive research ethics in the context of multiple relations? To do so, the article commences with a brief review of how multiple relations in small island/islanded communities are addressed in island scholarship. This is followed by a discussion of how islanders navigate multiple relations, using the Faroe Islands as case. The article moves on to discuss research ethics; firstly, procedure ethics, then codes of ethics and subsequently situated ethics, then moving on to address confidentiality and trust, and power relations in research. Penultimately, the framework of relational ethics is introduced as an approach to practicing island sensitive research ethics, after which the article is concluded.

Social relations in Island Studies and community studies

Within Island Studies, multiple relations and how they impact professional and institutional life, has been approached from the perspective of political institutions. Island Studies scholars have analysed how islandness and smallness shape political institutions. The literature widely acknowledges the blurred boundaries of formal and informal life in small island jurisdictions and how multiple relations impact politics and institutions (Anckar, 2006; Chittoo, 2011; Veenendaal, 2013, 2020a; Warrington & Milne, 2020). Politics, it is argued, becomes more personified and informal (Baldacchino, 2020; Baldacchino & Veenendaal, 2018; Corbett & Veenendaal, 2017; Veenendaal, 2020b), a result of social intimacy, multiple relations, and strong family ties. Some texts within Island Studies have more extended discussions of social relations and how they impact areas such as economies and migration (e.g., Alexander, 2015; Baldacchino & Veenendaal, 2018; Nimführ & Otto, 2021). However, in his discussion of smallness (including the importance of family and kin), Corbett (2015, p. 52) argues that "little is known about how politicians negotiate smallness."

The literature within anthropology, ethnology, and community studies has provided fruitful insight into a range of issues pertaining to island cultures and island communities, both in and for islands, including issues of race, coloniality and smallness. Despite reflexive approaches, there remain limited references to research ethical issues emerging from multiple relations, an argument which has also been put forward in other fields (see below). Moreover, the turn in community studies, from researching place-based communities to place-moderated and post-place communities (Carbone & McMillin, 2018), I suggest may have contributed to the gap in discussions of research ethics in island/islanded communities. In many writings, important insight has been provided into the social dynamics of small island/islanded places and how these impact processes and outcomes of, for example, politics and public institutions. However, discussions of how islanders, and island researchers, navigate multiple relations in place-based island/islanded communities while still orienting global functional communities remain important in ethics, not least considering that research ethics are increasingly being regulated (Israel, 2014).

Outside Island Studies, it has been argued that interconnected relations in small communities remain underexplored in the literature (Piché et al., 2015; Pugh, 2007), which is also the case for research ethics in such contexts (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012; Ellis, 2007; Simpson & McDonald, 2017). Increased attention has been given to post-place communities, often viewing these as dichotomic to place-based relations (Carbone & McMillin, 2018). This change of focus emerged from globalisation, entailing communities are less place-based, not necessitating shared geographical space. They are thus often approached as functional or post-place communities; online or professional, for instance (Carbone & McMillin, 2018; López, 2020; Somerville, 2016). However, I concur with Carbone and McMillin (2018) that to talk of small island/islanded (place-based) communities does not preclude post-place communities which islanders engage in. These can be considered as a continuum, both coexisting and shaping life in island/islanded places. Despite engaging in post-place communities, it is conceivable that small island/islanded communities isolated from other populated surroundings are likely to experience multiple relations, impacting social navigation. This is certainly the case for the Faroe Islands.

Social relations in the Faroe Islands

The Faroe Islands is a semi-autonomous island community (of Denmark) situated midway between Iceland and Shetland (Figure 1). The population of 54,000 have their own parliament, language, flag, and institutions, including a university with 1,000 students. With a small relatively homogenous population, social relations in the Faroe Islands have come to be characterised by interconnectedness, interdependency, and intimacy. These characteristics I have found to be significant, both in my own research (e.g., Hayfield, 2017; Hayfield, 2018; Hayfield & Schug, 2019) and that of others in the Faroe Islands (e.g., Gaffin, 1996; Gaini, 2013; Johannesen, 2012; Leonard, 2016). According to Gaini (2013, pp. 34–45), the Faroe Islands "is a society where every citizen has many positions and functions… Every individual has several different 'hats' to wear… the same persons meet on different arenas with different agendas and societal roles." Latterly, immigration has been on the increase. As such, the Faroe Islands is changing and becoming increasingly diverse. Immigrants find Faroese social networks difficult to access, and therefore, often construct belongingness within immigrant groups. However, due to the small population of the Faroe Islands,

immigrant groups sometimes also become characterised by the interconnectedness otherwise found in the Faroe Islands (Hayfield & Schug, 2019).

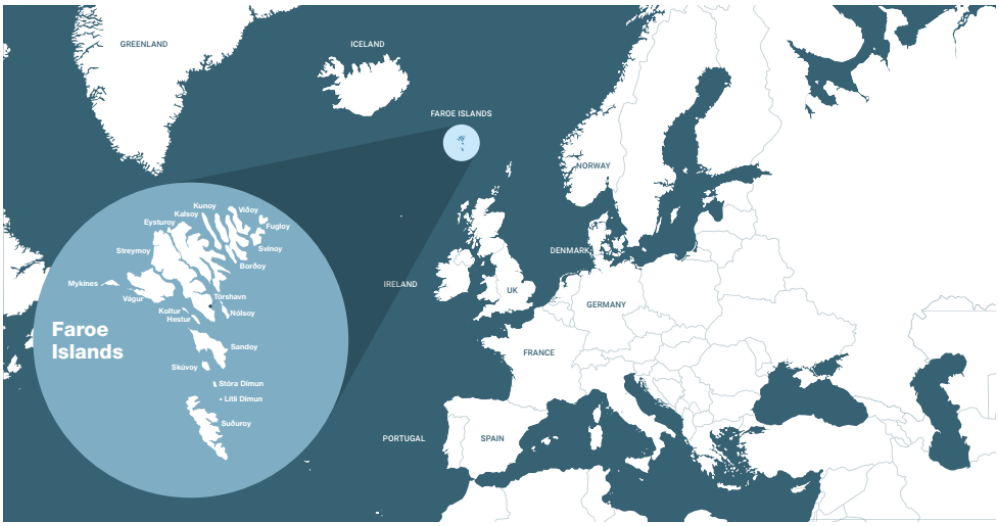

Figure 1- The Faroe Islands and their location in the north-east Atlantic.

Interconnectedness refers to dual or multiple relationships that people have with others (Piché et al., 2015; Pugh, 2007; Werth Jr. et al., 2010), being connected through networks and involved in others' lives, socially and professionally. They know and engage with the same people in overlapping social networks and there are high levels of familiarity amongst people, making anonymity impossible (Johannesen, 2012). In the Faroe Islands, being embedded in social and family networks is constructed as being integral to place-belongingness (Gaini, 2013). Faroe Islanders encounter layers of relations, entailing that people gain insight into many facets of others' lives. Thus, multiple relations lead to social transparency and extensive knowledge about others, also referred to as "layers of knowing" (Piché et al., 2015, p. 62).

Interdependency emerges as social ties become complex and overlapping, meaning that people rely on each other and navigate accordingly by anticipating future situations. In this sense, power dynamics are not straightforward and require researchers and informants to consider how decisions can impact relations in other settings. They may involve reciprocity, resistance, care, and concern. Essentially, interdependency and the ensuing power dynamics are continuously negotiated, albeit subtly and often implicitly.

Intimacy refers to the closeness that characterises the Faroe Islands as a profound sense of being part of a small island community. Intimacy becomes manifested as people are placed in what has been referred to as social or cognitive maps of the Faroese mind (Hayfield & Schug, 2019; Leonard, 2016). Intimacy further finds it expression through words identifying how people are connected, including the Faroese language itself, which according to Leonard (2016) is a "high-intimacy language."

In intimate island/islanded communities such as the Faroe Islands, people are compelled to have dealings with one another in different roles (Baldacchino & Veenendaal, 2018), even

when there are lines of conflict. Through such multiple dealings, a climate of intimacy may emerge, a closeness, and likely also social cohesion (Baldacchino & Veenendaal, 2018). Because such environments are socially transparent, people observe each other performing different roles. This can reveal inconsistencies in identity performances (Pugh, 2000), which may be conducive to less formality and flattened hierarchies. Intimate connections and personal knowledge can generate greater circumstantial awareness, which may in turn promote a relational ethics (Ellis, 2007).

Whilst interconnectedness, interdependency and intimacy provide insight into social relations, understanding how islanders navigate is important for an island sensitive research ethics. To navigate means moving within a constantly moving social landscape, where connections, dependencies and identities conflate and change. According to Vigh (2009, p. 420), social navigation "is an act of moving in an environment that is wavering and unsettled. [Furthermore] We act, adjust and attune our strategies and tactics in relation to the way we experience and imagine and anticipate the movement and influence of social forces." Whilst all people navigate, the intensity of navigation depends on the speed of social change and the extent people are able to control such movement (Vigh, 2009).

Thought into the context of small island/islanded communities, social life requires intense navigation, as people constantly take account of intricate maps of (conflicting) relations they are embedded in. Vigh (2009) draws attention to navigation as future-oriented. However, when navigating, islanders simultaneously consider past (historical relations), present, as well as future relationship scenarios. Social navigation thus becomes a practice of history, of being and becoming. In this sense, social navigation is reflexive, or what I refer to as *reflexive navigation*. However, reflexivity from this perspective is beyond the individualistic self-reflexivity of modernity, as a project of the self (D'cruz et al., 2007) or that associated with self-location and self-disclosure in research (Pillow, 2010). Rather, reflexivity is understood as a constant intentional engagement in, and response to, social and family interconnections, as a means to negotiate social interaction. In this sense of reflexivity, Faroe Islanders navigate relations based on a critical consciousness of the diverse social connections and positions that people have. Thus, people are understood within contexts of social networks or families, a moderate collective variant of individualism, which Gaini (2013) refers to as family-based individualism.

Reflexivity entails navigating different positions and considering the multitude of potential outcomes inherent in complex relational networks. To move towards a relational ethics, I lean on Gilbert and Sliep's (2009) reflexivity as a relational concept, as being constantly negotiated at the intra- and inter-psychological level. This means people consider and grapple with various standpoints and potential outcomes, emplacing past, current and future connections, and relations. Furthermore, reflexivity is relational, context-based and continuously defined according to time and space (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009). Rather than being a question of *I* as in self-reflexivity, it becomes a matter of *us*. In other words, *we* concerns embeddedness in multiple relations and moral responsibility to others across time and space. I, therefore, define reflexive navigation as the relational acting of continuously engaging with, anticipating, moving, orienting, and reorienting social practices in contexts with complex and constantly changing interconnected relations.

To summarise the argument thus far, social navigation in small island/islanded communities with multiple relations requires people to be socially perceptive. The inevitability of interaction in different roles is not only acknowledged (Campbell & Gordon,

2003), it is a matter of reflexive navigation. Whilst it can cause both comfort or discomfort, for those who live and practice in such communities, reflexive navigation is an embedded feature of everyday social life. In what follows, I use the Faroe Islands to address small island/islanded communities as research contexts and consider how multiple relations may impact research ethics.

Research ethics in small island/islanded communities

This section turns more specifically to research ethics in small island/islanded communities, commencing with a discussion of procedural ethics and research ethics codes. Situational research ethics are subsequently introduced as a perspective to incorporate multiple relations into ethics. Ethical issues of confidentiality and trust, and power are then discussed. Far from being an exhaustive discussion, I focus on ethical issues, which are especially pertinent in small island/islanded communities characterised by reflexive navigation.

Procedural ethics are generally associated with ethical norms, based on (Western) individualised values, and explicated in the form of ethical guidelines (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). These may be drawn up as national research ethical codes, by research institutions or as professional codes (e.g., in social anthropology, sociology, psychology). Research ethics codes vary globally and are established in most Western countries, yet increasingly in non-Western countries (Israel, 2014). Nevertheless, the rise in "'top-down', more centralised approaches [to research ethics, entails that social scientists are increasingly] subject to regulations" (Israel, 2014, pp. 77–78). Presently, explicit research ethics governance in the Faroe Islands is mainly restricted to genetic/physically invasive human research, as well as (EU-centred) legislation governing personal data. However, in 2022 the University of the Faroe Islands established a research ethics committee, assigned to draw up institutional research ethics codes. Until such time, though, social sciences research projects at the University of the Faroe Islands are not formally approved by an in-house ethics committee.

Research ethics codes require researchers to demonstrate upfront how issues of confidentiality, informed consent, disclosure, and power relations are dealt with. Such codes are modelled on bioethics and have come under much criticism for being ill-fitted to qualitative research (Dingwall, 2012), for promoting "empty ethics" (Corrigan, 2003), for being a rationalised, frustrating process, merely teaching researchers to use 'correct' rhetorics (Monaghan et al., 2013) and for lacking cultural sensitivity (Gray et al., 2017). It is especially the lack of cultural insight which I address here. In reacting to the 'one-size-fits-all' critique of universalised research ethics (Msoroka & Amundsen, 2018), some countries, institutions and scholars have argued for alternative research ethics, which take account of different peoples' worldviews, or regional and context-specific research models, for example, the Cook Islands (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019). Such approaches are important, not least due to variations in societal conceptualisations of the self and interdependencies with others (Clough et al., 2013). I argue for research ethics that take context-sensitive approaches to ethics in small island/islanded communities characterised by multiple relations. I am not necessarily advocating for more ethical codes, rather for research institutions which operate/engage with small islands/islanded communities to be sensitised to small island/islanded relations through the resourcing and support of research ethics to researchers and students alike.

Writings on ethics in qualitative research have become increasingly concerned with those dimensions of ethics which emerge in practice, known as situational ethics (Ellis, 2007). Procedural ethics, on the other hand, describe and predict ethical issues at the outset, prior to commencing research, often during processes of project approval or funding. When researchers attend to procedural ethics, typically prescribed in ethics codes, situations such as that in the vignette at the outset of this article might not have been further explored as ethically significant. Situational ethics attend to the everyday ethics in research and require of researchers an ongoing ethical alertness to recognise "ethically important moments" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Such moments may transpire throughout all stages of research and be especially manifested in issues of consent, confidentiality, and researcher–participant relations. When researchers are part of small island/islanded communities, they are themselves immersed in multiple relationships. Therefore, ethical responsibilities are complex and involve reflexively navigating own and informant's networked relationships.

Whilst ethics codes remain important as overarching guidelines for conducting research, they do not normally attend to complex relations and unpredictable everyday moments in research. The premise of such codes is generally that research is conducted with strangers (Ellis, 2007) and in (typically large) settings in which multiple relationships are much less an issue. They are, furthermore, individualistic in nature prescribing norms for how researchers should act in given circumstances (Vermeylen & Clark, 2017). I argue that research ethics for small, interconnected communities should be made explicit, to enable researchers to identify and implement context sensitive strategies (Damianakis & Woodford, 2012).

One approach to situational ethics is through relational ethics, similar to an ethics of care (Ellis, 2007; Lahman et al., 2011), as it "recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work" (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). Adopting a relational approach entails researchers become more ethically alert and responsive to the significance of past, present, and future social encounters within small island/islanded communities. Being embedded in island/islanded communities "we can talk of being held morally responsible for our actions… moral action in such a light moves to being a public rather than a private act and is sensitive to on-going interaction with others, whilst being mindful of the particular context" (Gilbert & Sliep, 2009, p. 473). Whether researchers arrive as strangers or already are immersed within small island/islanded communities, an ethical stance requires they pay attention to interconnectedness, interdependency, and intimacy.

Confidentiality and trust

Confidentiality is generally taken to relate to agreements researchers have with informants regarding how data, resulting from their involvement in research is used (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). I attend also to trust as a central feature of confidence (Giordano et al., 2007). Firstly though, the issue of maintaining privacy in research conducted in small island/islanded communities is addressed. In such places people are easier identified and being anonymous is almost impossible. Furthermore, intimacy and layers of social knowledge is conducive to greater social transparency (Piché et al., 2015). Even the mere visit of a (known to be) researcher to someone's house can be observed, questioned and conclusions drawn about the nature of that visit. In this respect, one can differentiate

between internal and external confidentiality (Tolich, 2004). External confidentiality ensures that identities are kept private to external others, e.g., the wider community or international audiences. Internal confidentiality, on the other hand, implies that insiders who hold sufficient knowledge can identify internal others through research texts.

In small island/islanded communities, protecting participant privacy might necessitate more extensive "data cleaning," to remove personal or demographic identifiers (Petrova et al., 2016), or even omitting data altogether. Knowing when informants are sufficiently protected may be a tricky affair, especially in qualitative research which contain rich accounts of social life (Kaiser, 2009). Those experienced in the social dynamics of small island/islanded communities may be more astute in upholding privacy, compared to stranger researchers. Ellis' (2007) ethnography, conducted in a coastal community, is an example of the problematics of internal confidentiality. When reading her book, informants easily identified other informants and their stories, causing hurt and uproar (Ellis, 2007).

Implicit in confidentiality is that information, potentially of a sensitive nature, is entrusted to the researcher. The importance of trust in research is often recognised and implicitly conveyed. Yet, as a concept in the context of research, trust is too seldom discussed (Guillemin et al., 2016). Guillemin et al. (2016) suggest that trust is about one party, *A*, trusting another, *B*, to do something, e.g., treat information confidentially. However, in small island/islanded communities, where private and professional relationships tend to be blurred (Baldacchino & Veenendaal, 2018), it may be unclear in what capacity *A* is trusting *B*. In this sense, researcher, and informant, may find themselves reflexively navigating past, present, and future relational encounters. For informants, such navigation involves assessing risks to self and others in the community and can impact which truths are told (Matheson et al., 2020). Importantly though, whether and the extent to which trust is instilled in research institutions and/or researchers themselves may vary in different cultures (Guillemin et al., 2018) and based on past experiences that islanders have with institutions. Therefore, it is pertinent that island research institutions focus on island-sensitive ethics.

According to Lewicki et al. (1998), trust and distrust can co-exist and are not opposite ends of a continuum. Rather, different elements contribute to the growth and decline of trust and distrust. These elements, Lewicki et al. (1998, p. 440) argue, "grow and develop through an individual's experiences with another in the various facet-specific transactions of multiplex relations [and] it is possible for parties to both trust and distrust one another." In other words, informants can entrust a researcher in the capacity of research, whilst they might distrust the researcher in other capacities, or vice versa. This means that when building trust with research informants in small island/islanded communities, researchers need to reflexively navigate different relations. Building confidence as a foundation for trust entails reflexively navigating multiple relations researchers may have with informants, including the wider relations informants have with others.

Power relations

A core principle in research ethics is that of informed consent. Based on discourses of human rights and autonomy, consent entails that participation in research is voluntary and based on informed choice (Corrigan, 2003). Being informed means that informants know and understand the nature, purpose, objective, methods, and potential risks of the

research. As a relatively standardised procedure, the process of informed consent typically involves obtaining informants' signature on a form – a procedure adopted from biomedical research (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007). However, when consent is restricted to information and dialogue up front, it is stripped of its social context, the situated ethics, and is what Corrigan (2003) terms an *empty ethics*.

In small island/islanded communities, researchers may not enter research settings with the master identity of researcher. Rather, emplacement in networks and multiple relations shape how they are understood and received. The extract from my own fieldnotes at the start of this article is an example of withholding consent until my participant 'knew' me. A further illustration of conflated identities is when a colleague was about to interview three gentlemen for a research project. As she explained the project and consent to her informants, one of the gentlemen interrupted her asking, "But why are you telling us all this? We know you are Dánjal Peter's daughter. So, it will be okay." In this case, third-party relations instilled trust in the researcher-participant relations. However, entering research settings with multiple connections necessitates researchers in small island/islanded communities that they are perceptive of interdependency in relations. Being interdependent entails that people may have more invested in relations, as conflicts in one setting can spill over into another (Baldacchino & Veenendaal, 2018).

Social relations characterised by interdependency may entail that knowledge from one context can create power asymmetries in another. Whilst researchers might hold a power differential vis-à-vis informants, there may be other power differentials in the relationship, stemming from previous encounters. Therefore, being ethically alert to power dynamics is an important tool in reflexive navigation.

The term *guilty knowledge* has usually been associated with situations in which researchers become aware of illicit activities. Williams (2010), however, has widened the concept to encompass knowledge beyond the illicit or illegal. Guilty knowledge, she argues, includes knowledge which, if known to others, may cause social harm, e.g., be of embarrassment to informants. In small island/islanded communities, bringing guilty knowledge (from research) into future encounters can be a course of discomfort for informants and researchers alike. Therefore, the possibility of future (unforeseen) encounters is integral to reflexive navigation in small island/islanded communities.

Ethical reflexive navigation in practice

I now move on to suggest relational ethics (the care-tradition) (Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 1993) as a suitable framework to reflexively navigate research in small island/islanded communities. Empirical situations can be read variously, and in this sense no ethical framework is in itself all-inclusive. Therefore, reviewing situations through the lens of one ethical framework does not imply a rejection of other ethical perspectives. Rather, ethical theories can be applied to ethical challenges from more than one normative perspective (Lahman et al., 2011; Pettersen, 2011). In this sense, an ethics of care, I argue, can be applied to research in island/islanded communities alongside other normative ethical codes.

Relational ethics are especially relevant for research in small island/islanded communities as connectedness, respect and embeddedness of human relations are central features of relational ethics (Ellis, 2007). As an approach, it rests on a relational ontology, in which

reflexive navigation involves being "entrenched in a web of relationships" (Pettersen, 2011, p. 55). Consequently, relational ethics, which are responsibility-based, divert from ethical approaches, which are obligation-based and concern autonomy, rights and justice of the individual (Israel, 2014; Lachman, 2012). As a structure to discuss ethical research practice in small island/islanded communities, I apply the ethical qualities which Tronto (1993) argues should be present in an ethic of care. These are *attentiveness*, *responsibility*, *competence*, and *responsiveness*. Tronto (1993) considers these as ethical qualities in processes of caring relations. For analytical purposes, these are discussed separately, although they continuously overlap, are iterative and implicated in each other.

Attentiveness

Attentiveness refers to being sensitised to the standpoint of others and perceptive of ethical issues in a situation or a context. It requires understanding the needs of individuals or groups in interconnected relations. On the same token, relational ethics are also about caring for self. This means that researchers must be attentive to interconnectedness and interdependency, not only for their informant but also for future self-navigation. For instance, anticipating future encounters, meeting informants, or their family, may impact trust and consent. This is especially pertinent when sensitive or private information is conveyed. Therefore, attentiveness entails being perceptive of current and future needs of individuals or groups in an island/islanded community. For researchers who are experienced at navigating small island/islanded communities, this might be a position easier to inhabit and implement than for researchers from elsewhere. Being attentive to needs further involves gaining appropriate knowledge about place specificities and the nature of relations within small island/islanded communities, in which research is taking place. In this sense, place attentiveness is both understood, emerging and practiced to identify ethically important moments (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Øye et al., 2016).

Responsibility

When the needs of individuals or groups are identified, someone must take responsibility to ensure those needs are met. Evidently, researchers have a moral and professional responsibility to attend to ethics throughout the research process. In this sense, researchers must determine what action to take when confronted with ethical issues emerging from interconnectedness, interdependency, and intimacy.

One strategy, which might be appropriate, and even necessary in some cases, is to explicitly discuss with informants how they wish to interact in other settings, e.g., whether they should pretend to know each other or not. Such ethical considerations are important to ensure the confidentiality of informant identities, and equally because of what informants may reveal during a research encounter. Researchers may be privy to deeply personal information about informants, which can cause social discomfort in future encounters. In this sense, knowledge brought into new situations can make researchers feel they hold guilty knowledge. For instance, during an interview I conducted with an informant, details about an emotionally and psychologically difficult period of his life were provided, and even talking about it was upsetting for him. After the interview we agreed that if we meet again (which we often have), no reference to our meeting is made. In the context of interdependency in small island/islanded communities, layers of knowledge which emerge can be especially conducive to unequal power relations. Therefore, ethics entails explicitly anticipating and addressing future encounters.

Due to the potential conflation of professional and private roles, researchers can explicitly agree with informants that knowledge gained, and the researcher-informant relationship, is not brought into later encounters – to the extent that this might be possible. Therefore, actively discussing relations and negotiating research decisions, including consent and confidentiality, is important for reflexive navigation (Etherington, 2009). For instance, as part of gaining consent, researchers may need to disclose the names of others in the research team; for example, a transcriber might be connected to informants, in which case alternatives can be found for transcribing some interviews.

Writings in research ethics generally assume a power asymmetry between researchers and informants (Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2013), however, power distribution in small communities can be extremely complex and constantly shifting. This is not least due to interdependency in which people need each other in diverse settings, in diverse manners. Consequently, research encounters can be prone to reciprocity. For instance, people might agree to participate due to the underlying nature of interdependency in relations. Therefore, whilst researchers are keen to recruit informants, they should be ethically alert to avoid taking advantage of underlying sentiments of reciprocity. In this sense, ethical reflexive navigation involves researchers being attentive to the potential vulnerabilities of informants.

Competence

Practicing competence involves following through caring relations with sufficient adequacy. Such adequacy can range from the prioritisation of relational ethics in research institutions to the theoretical and experiential knowledge of researchers and research teams. Research institutions address research ethics on a general level, through bodies such as ethics committees and ethics codes. However, those institutions which engage directly or indirectly in small island/islanded communities require moral competencies of researchers and research institutions to ensure an ethic of care. This involves ethics committees which understand, support, and incorporate situational ethics into work processes. Not all researchers have experiential knowledge in navigating the social dynamics of small island/islanded communities. However, they should have access to knowledge, through case studies for instance, thus contributing to an ethical alertness. This is especially relevant for internal confidentiality, so that researchers are sensitised to the intimacy and lack of anonymity in small island/islanded communities.

Trust in research institutions is highly significant, yet such trust may be of greater importance in small island/islanded communities. Such communities may be more transparent, and stories of incompetency can travel fast. Placing trust in a researcher forms part of continuous informed consent. However, a relationship of trust between researcher and informant is also one in which a more ethical relationship emerges. Trust and the display of trustworthiness can be complex, as people may have preconceived understandings of researchers from previous encounters. Interestingly though, as Delgado-Márquez et al., (2012) point out; merely having a third party in common can enhance trust. The transparency of small island/islanded communities can, therefore, leave both researchers and research institutions highly vulnerable when mistakes are made. Therefore, the competencies and integrity of research institutions is significant in creating a climate of trustworthiness surrounding research. Likewise, the competencies and actions of researchers are significant to avoid harming institutional trust by way of association.

Responsiveness

Integral to a relational research ethics is ongoing alertness to responses by individual informants, groups, and communities (or animals and the environment, for that matter), which require a judgement concerning an appropriate course of action (Tronto, 1993). Responsiveness requires of researchers a reflexive navigation of "anomalies, challenges, and disturbances within our situated experience" (Springer, 2013, p. 141). Responsiveness is, therefore, strongly associated with attentiveness as an ethical quality which sensitises us to needs and concerns in the first place (Eckenwiler et al., 2015).

In research, issues can emerge throughout the research process, which can impact informant consent. This is the case for all research, however, I restrict the discussion here to challenges emerging from interconnectedness, interdependency, and intimacy. One aspect of responsiveness is to practice process consent, also referred to as continuous informed consent (Klykken, 2021). Such consent goes beyond standardised procedures, such as being informed and signing forms during the recruitment phase. Rather, continuous consent involves being attentive to and negotiating the limits of the researcher–informant relationship (Klykken, 2021).

There is an ethical responsibility on researchers to be responsive to potential changes that might emerge to consent in small island/islanded communities as research projects progress. A few years ago, a student, as part of a master's thesis, was recruiting informants for focus groups. The setting was a large town in the Faroe Islands and my student wanted informants to discuss local town planning in focus groups. The student encountered hesitation from people she contacted, as they wanted to know first "who else would be there" before deciding whether to participate. The concerns were about feeling safe to express their views, given they were acutely aware of the diverse opinions people in the locality held concerning town planning. As another dimension of continuous consent, I sometimes send quotes that I intend to use to informants to ensure they are comfortable with changed personal details and levels of confidentiality. Whilst some ethically important moments are easily identified, and require revisiting consent, there are inevitably more subtle cases that require greater ethical alertness. As such, navigating attentiveness and responsiveness as ethical qualities is inherent in practising continuous consent.

Conclusion

This article has argued for an island sensitive approach to research ethics in small island/islanded communities. The concept of reflexive navigation has been applied to frame how islanders live with complex social relations. On that basis, I have introduced relational ethics as one perspective to practicing situated ethics in small island/islanded communities. This is not to deny the importance of procedural ethics, which are ethical questions considered before research commences. However, procedural ethics are not sufficient. The discussion of situated ethics in small island/islanded communities is far from exhaustive, as situated ethics are just that, situated, meaning that ethically important moments are unpredictable. Yet, through ethical alertness, researchers are more prepared for those moments, rife with ethics, which emerge in everyday doings of research.

As I have argued in this article, research ethics tend to be conceptualised in the context of individualised societies and the assumption of relative anonymity. This means that there

lacks an ethical approach which takes account of multiple relations in small island/islanded communities. The issues raised in this article, therefore, invite an ethics in which we reflexively navigate interconnectedness, interdependency, and intimacy as part of island sensitive research ethics. Multiple relations are almost impossible to avoid in many small island/islanded communities, and in some cases ignoring this reality may lead to unethical research decisions.

Beyond individual researchers or their teams, I argue that research institutions are equally implicated in their responsibilities to island sensitive research ethics. This is not least the case when considering that students, too, in small island/islanded communities are often interested in researching their own 'backyards', so to speak. Therefore, while researchers and research institutions actively participate in ethics discourses, they should not uncritically adopt ethical codes designed for very different contexts. In this sense, responsibility implies going further than an *awareness* of small island relations research ethics. It entails actively shedding light on, integrating, and enabling situated ethics in research practice in small island/islanded communities.

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