Original Paper

Experience of Negotiating Access in the "Field": Lessons for Future Research

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Abstract

Accessing the field for the purposes of conducting research often starts with negotiation and engagement with gatekeepers. This is the first requirement for the research to be conducted; however, this step has challenges. While research has been conducted on negotiating access and research ethics, very little is known about the experiences of doctoral students from the Global South on negotiating access in fieldwork, and thus giving an account of what it entails conducting qualitative research from the Global South. As such, this article engages with the challenges of negotiating access to the field for my PhD studies. Due to the nature of research for my thesis, I conducted interviews with key informants from the departments and participants from the taxi ranks. In this article, I problematize the view that gaining access to the field is a simple process, by exposing my own uncomfortable encounters during the process.

Keywords

access, field, negotiation, interviews, qualitative research, taxi ranks, key informants, interviews, ethics in research

1. Introduction

Most of the researchers who make use of qualitative research methods hardly expose their experiences of gaining access to the field. In addition, extensive literature on methodology tends to simplify the process of collecting data (Okumus, Altinay, & Roper, 2006). Accessing the field for the purposes of conducting research starts with negotiation and engagement with gatekeepers. Not being able to gain access in the field can prevent qualitative researchers from conducting research. Gaining access in the field and proving that one has done so puts researchers under pressure to live up to the required standards. According to Azungah, "the process of negotiating with gatekeepers to be allowed into a

particular work setting to interview participants and to collect observational data is the first step of gaining access" (2019, p. 4). This is the first step—a precondition—or the research to be conducted.

Cunliffe and Alcadipani define access "as obtaining permission to get in to the organization to undertake research (*primary access*) and building relationships to gain access to people and information within the organization (*secondary access*)" (2016, p. 3). In communicating with the minibus taxi industry to request access, I had to handle this process with care. This is because negotiating access to the field is "complicated in that one may gain official permission to conduct research in an organisation but yet be unable to get cooperation and collaboration of lower employees or management" (Azungah, 2019, p. 4).

While research has been conducted on negotiating access and research ethics, very little is known about the experiences of doctoral students from the Global South on negotiating access in fieldwork. Ping-Chun notes that "it is still unclear what pursuing Qualitative Research (QR) from the Global South might entail" (2015, p. 1). This article aims to challenge the domination of the Global North in the literature on qualitative research.

While qualitative research has now been conducted extensively in the Global South, it remains unclear what the experiences of negotiating access in the field are. For example, Ntuli (2015), in his study of on "investigating the impact of the Taxi Recapitalisation Programme on the transport industry in Warwick avenue taxi rank in the eThekwini municipality", presented access as a straight-forward process. The author states that access was granted after submitting a letter showing that he was a student of Kwa-Zulu Natal. However, as I explain in the results section, access is not as straight-forward as Ntuli seems to suggest. Like Ntuli (2015), Mmadi (2012) fails to explain how he negotiated access in the taxi ranks. He only states:

> "The researcher did not gain access to participants through their employers or taxi
> associations. Prospective participants were approached in a personal capacity and
> were asked to take part in the study" (Mmadi, 2012, p. 68).

As such, the aim of this article is to debunk access—to do what Riese calls "to pause and examine it" (2018, p. 2). This article pauses and examines the challenges of gaining access to the field for qualitative research. I discuss these challenges using my own qualitative research on the impact of Taxi Recapitalisation Programme (TRP) on precarious working conditions within the minibus taxi industry in Johannesburg. In this article, I problematize the view that gaining access to the field is a simple process, by exposing my own uncomfortable encounters during the process while conducting research for my PhD in the Global South. I discus that the contribution of this article lies in broadening the conceptual and methodological literature about the process of negotiating access to the field. I note that future research, including research on the 4th Industrial Revolution will need to take the issues raised in this article into account.

This article exposes the voice of a qualitative researcher from a developing African country in the Global South. But, before I discuss the context of the study under which access was sought; methodology for this article; the results of negotiating access; discussion of the findings; contribution to the conceptual and methodological literature and study limitations, I review literature as it relates to the topic of negotiating access for qualitative research. While doing so, I identify gaps within the literature. Extensive literature on qualitative research hardly makes reference to the challenges of negotiating access to the field. Even the Ethics Committee within universities does not pay particular attention to this. This article is an attempt to fill such gaps and contributing to the existing literature. While Riese examined the "organizational dynamics behind the Greenpeace campaign against Norwegian whaling" (2018, p. 1), for my PhD I examined the lived experiences of the precariat. This article, therefore, presents the challenges of negotiating access with the precariat.

2. Literature Review

According to Peticca-Harris *et al.*, the process of negotiating access to the field is underlined by "the potential process for researchers to re-strategize their approach or exit the study" (2016, p. 376). I used field-notes to flesh out my experiences with negotiating access to the taxi ranks. My challenges with negotiating access in the taxi ranks, discussed below, signify that the process involves overcoming a number of obstacles, dealing with power relations—that is, dealing with gatekeepers. Therefore, this problematizes the "general view that gaining access is a "simple" process, by exposing my own uncomfortable encounters during the process (Ngcwangu, 2016). Through offering an understanding of the changing nature of gaining access, I "broaden the conceptual and methodological scholarship about this process, which often takes a mechanistic, 'tip-giving' approach. Instead, we highlight the perpetual risk of rejection throughout the process of gaining access and emphasize the importance of re-strategizing" (Peticca-Harris et al., 2016, p. 377).

Gaining access to the field is considered very important for both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Ngcwangu, 2016). But, for the purposes of this article I discuss the challenges of negotiating access to the field to conduct research using qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is used to gain a rich understanding of people's attitudes, behaviours, norms and values. Therefore, for researchers to be gain this rich understanding in their research careers, they need to first gain access in the field. This is because gaining access to the field is fundamental in understanding the world in which we live. To understand the precarious working conditions—in the context of my PhD. Gaining access to the field enables researchers to the study of people in ordinary events and activities, as they occur in real-life situation (within the society). Here, researchers explore real-life situations, and the reasons behind social interactions, and more importantly seeing life through the eyes of those being studied. In other words, studying the reasons behind precariousness within the minibus taxi industry. Like Riese,

who states that "the aim of qualitative research is to gain an understanding of people's realities" (2018, p. 2), through my PhD I aimed to gain an understanding of minibus taxi industry stakeholders' experiences.

Riese (2018) explains that knowledge produced in qualitative research is "relational"—in other words, it is co-created between the researcher and the researched. Through this relational process, the researcher and the participants engage to produce truthful knowledge about the nature of reality for the participants. Therefore, in order for this knowledge to be produced "access in qualitative research must be understood as relational and processual" (Riese, 2018, p. 3). Therefore, through access empirical data are produced. For access to be obtained in the field to conduct qualitative research there needs to be a relation between the researcher and the researched.

While access to the field may appear as a simple process when writing a proposal, it is in fact a complex process—"a multidirectional process" (Riese, 2018, p. 3). The process involves negotiating with gatekeepers who may be willing or not willing to grant access. The relationship between researchers and participants is negotiated on a continuing basis (Manderson & Wilson, 1998). Some researchers may make it hard for researchers to gain access. Research participants "may not trust researchers entirely if they gained access via a gatekeeper who is higher up in the hierarchy than the participant is" (Riese, 2018, p. 4). Defining gatekeepers, Clark argues that "gatekeepers within the research process are typically described as the individuals, groups, and organizations that act as intermediaries between researchers and participants" (2012, p. 486). They are central to the relational process because they provide access between the researchers and the participants. Thus, the success of the researcher in gaining access through the gatekeepers is important in ensuring that quality data is collected.

According to Clarck (2012), negotiating access to the field involves two steps. The first one is securing entry into the field. The second one is convincing participants to provide data through interviews. However, I argue that negotiating access to the field does not only involve these two steps. Negotiating access to the field is more than securing entry and persuading participants to provide data. Negotiation starts with making calls, sending emails and writing letters to the gatekeepers. As I explain in the results section, once access to the field has been granted, researchers need to find their way to the field, introduce themselves to the participants. This also involves asking participants to sign consent forms, indicating that they are willing to take part in the research process. In Table 1 below, I show the steps involved in negotiating access to the field, to illustrate that the process is not just about securing entry to the field and convincing participants to provide data.

Table 1. Steps in Negotiating Access in the Field

Steps	Methods
Step 1: Introducing the study to the participants	Contacting; sending emails; and writing letters to the gatekeepers
Step 2: Negotiating with the gatekeepers	Negotiating access to the field
Step 3: Finding your way to the field	Entering the field
Step 4: Getting consent from the participants	Negotiating conversations with the participants
Step 5: Getting participants sign consent forms	Negotiating with participants to sign consent forms
Step 6: Negotiation with the participants	Negotiating with the participants to be tape-recorded
Step 7: Interacting with participants	Asking participants questions

It is clear that the process of negotiating access to the field for qualitative research is a complex one—as I show on the results section below. As Vuban and Eta put it, the research process has specific "ethical codes of conduct or guidelines to be observed" (2019, p. 2). The guidelines are certainly not limited to obtaining ethics approval for the Ethics Committee. While different universities around the world require that researchers follow and apply ethical principles in their research, researchers face ethical challenges as they engage participants during the research process.

The importance of gaining access to the field cannot be underestimated, especially considering that most universities only pay particular attention to "other stages of the research process such as the design of research instruments, determining required sample sizes and planning for data collection" (Hayes, 2005, p. 1194). It is assumed that gaining access to the field will be unproblematic, especially when the study is planned well and asking interesting questions that will contribute to literature. While access may seem like a straight forward process, gaining access also involves access to key documents as part of documentary research. So, navigating the negotiation to access process is a full of contradictions, as explained in the findings section. Negotiating access to the field involves an amalgamation of planning, determination and luck. Okumus et al., state that "entering into organizations can be more difficult if the research focuses on a sensitive topic" (2006, p. 2).

While research has been conducted in different contexts making use of qualitative research (Baloyi, 2012; Mashishi, 2011; Ntuli, 2015), there is little literature on the negotiation of access in the field. In his study on the analysis of the Taxi Recapitalisation Policy, Moyake (2006) failed to explain how he negotiated access to the field. While the researcher mentioned that "semi-structured interviews were conducted with relevant respondents" (Moyake, 2006, p. 9), it is unclear how he negotiated access. For example, he only explains the people who granted permission, but fails to account of how access was

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negotiated.

In addition to this, Mosomane (2014) studied the "non-compliance implications of the decent work indicators within the Gauteng retail sector" and made used of qualitative and quantitative research methods to collect data. However, the researcher failed to outline how he negotiated access to conduct interviews and distribute questionnaires. The researcher explains that "questionnaires conducted with people working in the retail industry provided insight into their daily working conditions within this sector with regard to non-compliance with decent work indicators" (Mosomane, 2014, p. 44), but does not explain how he negotiated the distribution of these questionnaires. It is as if the researcher distributed the questionnaires without prior consent.

Similar to this, while Woolf (2013, p. 42) states that their "task was to ask each person for permission to interview them", and does not explain how they asked each person—in other words, how they negotiated access. Also, Bristow (2015) in his study of the MyCiti bus system did not explain how he negotiated access with the research participants. For example, the researcher states that he "interviewed three taxi owners who live and operate in Imizamo Yethu and three elders/ community leaders" (Bristow, 2015, p. 9), without clarifying how he negotiated access to the three taxi owners especially knowing the complications of negotiating access. It's as if he presented access as a simple process, with only "yes" answers when a researcher conducts interviews.

Therefore, while different research topics have been conducted around the world making use of either quantitative or qualitative research methods or both, most researchers do not expose their experiences of gaining access to the field when reporting how they collected data (Okumus, 2006). Researchers report their data collection findings as if this was a straightforward process—one-way street. In light of this, the following results section aims to fill this gap by exposing my experiences of collecting data in relation to the first step of the process—which is negotiating access. As Ngcwangu puts it, "without successfully negotiating access, research comes to a screening halt" (2016, p. 146). Throughout the research process, access to the field is negotiated and renegotiated. Before I discuss the results of the article, I first outline the context of the research study and the methodology used in respect of this article.

3. Context of the Research Study

I sought access to the field for the purposes of my PhD in 2018. For my PhD, I focused on the impact of the Taxi Recapitalisation Programme (TRP)—now the Revised TRP—on precarious working conditions within the minibus taxi industry in South Africa. In order to investigate this impact, I planned to conduct interviews with the following group of participants:

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- *taxi owners; taxi drivers; taxi marshals;*
- *the South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO);*
- *South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU);*
- *SA Taxi Development Finance;*
- *National Taxi Alliance (NTA);*
- *Department of Labour (DoL);*
- *Department of Transport (DoT);*
- *Gauteng Department of Roads and Transport (GDoRT); and*
- *Gauteng Provincial Regulatory Entity (GPRE).*

Through engagements with these participants, I discovered that the TRP has had a minimal impact on precarious working conditions in the industry. I explain this in the thesis and my other paper. Before I discuss the results of negotiating access with the participants, I first outline the methods used to negotiate access.

4. Methodology

This article is a reflection of my experiences in negotiating access in the field during fieldwork and data collection for my PhD, in 2018. Negotiating access to the field with the key informants involved sending emails and making calls. Once access was approved, I arranged meetings to introduce the study and conduct interviews. While access with the key informants was quite straightforward, negotiating access was complex in the taxi ranks. In this context, negotiating access moved from contacting the taxi bosses—NTA and SANTACO—to the taxi owners, and back to the taxi associations—United Taxi Association Front (UTAF)—and the taxi bosses. For the purposes of my thesis, I conducted 58 interviews against the target of 56, with the majority of 41 interviews conducted in the four main taxi ranks of the City of Johannesburg, namely: Bree taxi rank, Faraday taxi rank, Noord taxi rank, and Wanderers taxi rank.

Therefore, the data for this article are based on my reflections during data collection in Johannesburg. Vuban and Eta explain reflection as "the practice of periodically stepping back to ponder the meaning of what has recently transpired to ourselves and to others in our immediate environment" (2019, p. 4). So, on a daily basis, I had to step back and right reflections on the meaning of negotiating access in the taxi ranks and with key informants. Through journaling, I practiced reflection each day (Amulya, 2011).

Amulya (2011) explains that journaling is important during the research process as it allows the researcher to be reflective. I used fieldnotes to flesh out my experiences with negotiating access to the taxi ranks. My challenges with negotiating access in the taxi ranks, discussed below, signify that the research process involves overcoming several obstacles, dealing with power relations—that is, dealing

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with gatekeepers. Therefore, this problematizes the general view that gaining access is a "simple" process, by exposing my own uncomfortable encounters during the process. Through offering an understanding of the changing nature of gaining access, I "broaden the conceptual and methodological scholarship about this process, which often takes a mechanistic, 'tip-giving' approach. Instead, I highlight the perpetual risk of rejection throughout the process of gaining access and emphasize the importance of re-strategizing" (Peticca-Harris et al., 2016, p. 377).

5. Results

5.1 Negotiating Access in the Field: Key Informants' Spaces and Taxi Ranks

Due to the nature of research for my thesis that necessitated that I conduct interviews with different stakeholders of the minibus taxi industry, I had to negotiate access in various ways. Accessing the field required that I send emails to the key informants: DoT; GDoRT; GPRE; DoL; SATAWU; SA Taxi Development Finance; SANTACO and NTA. While negotiation access with the participants from "above"—the key informants—I researched on their background information, for example in relation to the TRP policy. Access to conducting interviews with the key informants was quite restricted, with the need to set appointments with the interviewees. As Gokah (2006, p. 67) states, "because access to elites is often restricted, researchers commonly find they need to approach interview subjects well in advance and in a formal way, deal with need to approach subjects well in advance and in a formal way, deal with problems of incomplete and possibly unrepresentative samples, and gain approval from multiple gatekeepers prior to gaining direct contact with potential informants". In addition, I had complications with accessing the report of the TRP review. Negotiating access to this necessitated that I lodge a request of the report using the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) of 2000 to grant me access to the report. I sent the request to the Information Officer of the DoT, as per the PAIA.

Concerning the negotiation of access in taxi ranks, I requested SANTACO and NTA to assist. Negotiating access in Bree taxi rank and Faraday taxi rank was particularly a lot of work, where one taxi owner refused to sign a consent form and, instead referred me to the Faraday Taxi Association. I then had to call the Secretary of the Faraday Taxi Association to arrange for a meeting, in order to negotiate access to the taxi rank. He advised that I attend their regional meeting with all the taxi associations in attendance in Kliptown, to negotiate access and possible conduct interviews with taxi owners. On attending the regional meeting, access to the taxi ranks was not granted. Instead, I was referred to the United Taxi Association Front (UTAF). After speaking to the Secretary of the UTAF, he referred me to the NTA for further assistance. I then met with the NTA and interviewed its Spokesperson. I was advised to go to the taxi ranks and indicate if I am facing any complications. But, before I went to the taxi ranks, the Secretary of the NTA asked that I write an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) to confirm that I will not give the information I gather to the competitor—the buses. I

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then wrote this and sent to the Secretary to sign.

5.2 Access to the Field Granted: Entering the Spaces from "above" (Key Informants) and Spaces Form "below" (Taxi Ranks)

On gaining access to the spaces of the key informants, one of the experiences of interviewing people in positions of power such as the Gauteng Member of the Executive Committee (MEC) for Roads and Transport was that of the interview relationship. These people are knowledgeable about the field and have "effective communication skills arising from their role as a leader" (Liu, 2018, p. 6). In interviewing people in the positions of power, just like (Harvey, 2015), it was important to show that I have done my homework on my knowledge of the topic under investigation. Therefore, when access was granted to the spaces from above, I prepared for the interviews.

When access to the spaces was granted from below, I walked around in all taxi ranks introducing myself as a PhD student from the University of Johannesburg, conducting research on the impact of taxi recapitalisation programme on precarious working conditions within the minibus taxi industry. I used my student card and study information sheet to confirm that I am from the University of Johannesburg. Although I did not live in Johannesburg during the period of this thesis, I became familiar with the taxi ranks through regular visits. At first, some of the participants did not know what the TRP was, until I referred to it as a scrapping programme. Some of the gatekeepers within the taxi ranks asked questions which required explanation. Cunliffe and Alcadipani (2016, p. 13) calls this "*the rhetoric access*", where gatekeepers ask the following questions: "what exactly are you doing? What resources (time, money, space, etc.) will this require? How will it benefit us? What will happen to the data you get? And how can you possibly explain what we are doing?" (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, p. 13). Even though some of these questions were covered in the participant's information sheets and consent forms, it was not easy to get access granted right away. Therefore, getting access granted was not just about presenting a proposal for my thesis and getting it accepted by the Higher Degrees Committee/Ethics Committee, it was also about connecting to the taxi ranks and key informants. It required that I provide a detailed explanation of what I was doing.

While I was an educated black man who was an "outsider" in the taxi ranks, being able to speak Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho gave me an advantage to the participants. Speaking these languages helped in the process of building trust with the participants. The advantages of being able to speak these languages was particularly important considering language is a barrier for most researchers who mediate this "through the use of a translator or interpreter" (Squires, 2009, p. 277). While I was able to speak these languages, I had to translate the transcripts for the purposes of data analysis.

Therefore, gaining access to the field if more than being permitted to the taxi ranks, it also involves access to the minds of the participants. In other words, the ability to converse with them in their language comfortable space and language.

5.3 Interacting with the Participants

While access to the field was granted, I had to negotiate access to conversing with the participants. This involved convincing the participants to participate, through explanation and information sheets, to asking participants to sign consent forms as per the requirement of the study and asking to record the interviews. The main challenge was with conducting interviews with the taxi owners who were very reluctant to participate for fears of saying something wrong that would get them into trouble. While I interviewed taxi owners, taxi drivers and taxi marshals, I also interviewed the key informants. This data collection experience described as "studying up" as well as down (Galliher, 1980, p. 298). In interviewing elites in departments and organisations, I had to make preparations; gaining access and establishing trust. Liu defines elite as referring to "different people or things depending upon the area in which the term is being studies" (2018, p. 1). One of the experiences of interviewing people in positions of power such as the Gauteng MEC for Roads and Transport was that of the interview relationship. These people are knowledgeable about the field and have "effective communication skills arising from their role as a leader" (Liu, 2018, p. 6). In interviewing people in the positions of power, just like Harvey (2015), it was important to show that I have done my homework on my knowledge of the topic under investigation.

Through my data collection experience in the taxi ranks, I gained an understanding of the nature of work in these spaces. This understanding is what Jana defines at the "the knowledge and insight that the researcher develops during the research process" (1993, p. 434). However, while conversing with the participants in the taxi ranks to gain an understanding of precarity, they were uncomfortable talking about their salaries—their monthly income. Following this, I had to be careful of what Randall and Koppenhaver regard as "flawed assumption that everything can be talked about. There may well be certain subjects which people are not only prohibited from *discussing* but which they are discouraged from *thinking*" (2004, p. 74). Certainly, the silence of some participants on the conversation about their monthly income did not mean that they considered the topic as unimportant. It just meant that they considered it as a topic that cannot be discussed with anyone from outside the taxi ranks. This made access to the minds of the participants quite complicated.

To overcome the methodological challenges of asking "sensitive" questions during the interviews with taxi drivers, taxi marshals and taxi owners, I introduced demographic questionnaires. The purpose of the demographic questionnaires is to gain background information about the participants (Randall & Koppenhaver, 2004). Therefore, in order to gain background information about the participants in the taxi ranks, my demographic questionnaires had the following sections:

- Question about the category of participants—whether a participant is a taxi owner, taxi driver or taxi marshal.

- Demographic information on gender, age, language, nationality, and highest level of qualification.

- Questions on the employment status of participants—whether they are full-time; part-time; or self-employed.

- Question on whether participants have a contract of employment.

- Lastly, a question about the monthly income of participants. This has three categories—monthly salary bands—below R5000; between R5000 and R10 000; and above R10 000.

The demographic questionnaires revealed that most of the participants were male—with only one female—and from South Africa. This suggested that the industry is a male dominated industry as revealed by the literature (Sauti, 2006). Participants were between the age of 25 and 73; most completed secondary school and some with primary school. Also, most participants were full-time and some self-employed, with the former mostly taxi drivers and taxi marshals, and the latter being taxi owners. All participants did not have a contract of employment. In addition, the monthly income for all taxi drivers was less than R5000 a month; and for taxi marshals it was mostly between R5000 and R10 000. For the taxi owners, the monthly income was between R5000 and R10 000 or more. However, while the demographic questionnaires revealed this information about the participants, it is important to note that some participants were comfortable to mention their income—as discussed in the finding chapters. Taxi drivers mentioned that they are paid approximately R500 weekly but noted that this fluctuates every week depending on the taxi fares they generate. I explain this condition in my next article on precarious labour conditions in the minibus taxi industry. For the purposes of my thesis, it was important that I maintain access throughout the research process.

5.4 Maintaining Access throughout the Research Process

Developing relationships with the key role players in the taxi ranks was important for both gaining and maintaining access. Like Cunliffe and Alcadipani (2016), who proposed that the researcher-research participant relationship can be viewed from three perspectives—in in instrumental, *transactional*, and *relational* ways, it was important that established rapport with the participants. From an *instrumental* perspective, Cunliffe and Alcadipani argue that "the researcher perceives herself or himself as a neutral investigator who does not get involved with, nor disclose personal information to, research 'subjects' (the people to be studied) because that may bias the research and academic outcomes (journal publications, etc.)" (2016, p. 8). Therefore, in requesting access to the participants for my research, I contacted and engaged them, and created their desire for the research outcomes—the product. This was important for the purposes of maintaining access with the participants (Ngcwangu, 2016).

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The *transactional perspective* is concerned with creating reciprocity between researcher and participants, "where access is granted based on offering something of value to the organization in exchange for data collection" (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, p. 8). However, while Cunliffe and Alcadipani rightly point out that participants grant access based on offering something of value to them, this was not the case for my thesis. The participants did not expect that I offer them something before granting access. This implies that participants are critical to the success of a research project (Vuban & Eta, 2019).

For the purposes of my thesis, I developed working relationships with the participants. This is in correspondence to the *relational* perspective where "the nature of the relationship between researcher and research participants (people with multiple interests engaged in the research) is about developing relationships characterized by integrity and mutuality and holding oneself morally accountable to others" (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016, p. 9). Throughout my research process, I maintained a level of trust and recognition of the participants. The following section discusses these results in correspondence to the literature in order to fill the noticed gaps.

6. Discussion

The preceding sections are intrinsically-linked—the review of literature presented gaps to be filled; methodology outlined how I sought filling these gaps and the results filled these gaps. For example, while Nipha (2016, p. 7) stated his study used "a mixed research method", it is not clear how he negotiated access in the field to conduct interviews. This article, therefore, fills this gap by outlining the experiences of negotiating access in the field—an uncomfortable process. A process full of contradictions—"yes", "no", "maybe", and "questions" from participants. The results section demonstrates that negotiating access in the field for the purposes of conducting qualitative or quantitative research can be daunting and with many challenges (Peticca-Harris et al., 2016). The process can be continuous throughout the entire duration of the data-gathering process. Therefore, it is important to ensure that there is good relation with research participants. During my data collection in the taxi ranks, it was important that I study the social structure of the ranks in order to navigate through the system. I had to study the structures or locations of the four main taxi ranks in Johannesburg. Negotiating access to the field is, therefore, not something that is "negotiated once and settled for the whole fieldwork" (Laryea & Hughes, p. 2).

Like Ngcwangu (2016, p. 148) who stated that "accessing the field a departure from conventional methods of calling up or emailing a potential interviewee", my negotiation for access in the field involved various ways outlined in Table 1 above. Therefore, negotiating access required different activities beyond the formal way of accessing interviewees outlined in the study information sheets. In negotiating access in the field, I moved from formal access in the form of making calls, sending emails,

signing of consent forms to continued access and mental access. That is, I moved from physical access to continued and mental access. Gummesson (2000) defines physical access as the ability to get close to the participant of the study. That is, my ability to get close to the key informants, taxi owners, taxi marshals and taxi drivers. Continued access is the process of maintaining a continuous physical access to the context of the study (Laurila, 1997). While I was not in Johannesburg fulltime at the time of my data collection, I maintained continued access with the key informants and taxi bosses. The continued access with the key informants involved requesting documents (such as the report of the TRP review) from the Director of the Taxi Industry Development in the DoT. During my data collection, I was also invited by the SANTACO leadership to make a presentation of my study in their workshop. At the meeting, access to the taxi ranks was granted including the possibility of interviewing the President of the SANTACO, Mr Philip Taaibosch. The invitation to participate in the workshop was the need to know more about the study before granting access—what Cunliffe and Alcadipani (2016) calls a "rhetoric access". Through the workshop, I maintained a continued access to the taxi ranks.

Another important form of access is mental access. According to Gummesson (2000), mental access is the ability of the participants to understand the purpose of the research and why particular questions are asked. Therefore, while gaining mental access from some participants was not cumbersome, this proved complicated in the context of most participants in the taxi ranks where one question was considered as sensitive. This was a question about their salaries so as to understand the precariousness industry. Therefore, gaining mental access is presented with complications that necessitates considering different methods of asking questions that are considered sensitive. In this context, it is important that researchers establish rapport between them and participants (Laurila, 1997).

Therefore, any future research—including research on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (often referred to as Revolution 4.0) should take my findings into account. For example, in order to understand the impact of the often referred to as Revolution 4.0 on employment, researchers will need to consider issues of negotiating access in the field seriously.

7. Contribution to the Conceptual and Methodological Literature

Therefore, this article contributes to the literature on negotiating access to the field for qualitative research. The conceptual clarity of "access in the field" has been subject to analysis, given the immense range of activities it is said to incorporate. It is worth noting that there is little literature presenting the different activities that negotiating access in the field involves. This is partly because researchers mostly follow the formal access as required by the Ethics Committees in different universities but fail to account of different activities that access includes.

In addition to conceptual contribution, this article is also making a methodological contribution by noting that conducing interviews, for example, does not happen on a one-way street. It occurs in a complex

setting, with different views of what is considered right or wrong. Therefore, negotiating access in the field should be viewed "as a process and not an activity" (Gokah, 2005, p. 67). While researchers may construct questions and consider such questions as useful to gain valid responses, the participants are likely to find these sensitive—in other words, as uncomfortable to talk about with anyone. This present challenges for researchers and the need to rethink their research methods. It is clear from my experiences—as outlined in the results—that negotiating access to the field involves logistical and ethical considerations. The logistical challenge is related to the validity and credibility of the research process. This is about fairness and maintenance of standards.

8. Study Limitations

Of the four taxi ranks in Johannesburg, my study aimed to negotiate access and conduct interviews with three taxi owners, two taxi marshals, and five taxi drivers per taxi rank. However, out of all the taxi ranks data collection was conducted, a total of nine taxi owners were interviewed against a target of twelve. This is because taxi owners displayed unwillingness to participate in the study for fear of saying something wrong. They kept on referring me to those in leadership within the industry. Therefore, NTA and UTAF assisted with accessing and inviting taxi owners to participate. Also, some taxi marshals mentioned that they did not have time to talk to me—hence making it difficult to negotiate access. For example, out of all the taxi ranks a total of six taxi marshals were interviewed against a target of right. So, while physical access was granted, it was still difficult to talk to some of the participants. The only target exceeded was that of the taxi drivers, where a total of twenty-six taxi drivers were interviewed against a target of twenty. This was because taxi drivers showed willingness to grant access to interest in bettering their working conditions.

9. Conclusion

Negotiating access to the field forms an integral part of conducting research using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Access is more than the formal access required by the Ethics Committees in universities. It is complex—involves different activities in the research process. Therefore, is important that researcher take this into account when conducting research and make use of different strategies when negotiating access to the field. This applies to all researchers in the North and Global South. In other words, the experiences of conversing with the precariat should not only be considered from the lens of the Northern hemisphere, but also the Southern hemisphere.

Conflict of Interest

I do not have conflict of interest to declare.

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