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Reciprocal Vulnerability: Privilege, Violence, and Solidarity From Fieldwork to Academia
Vulnérabilité réciproque : privilège, violence et solidarité du terrain jusqu'à l'université
Wechselseitige Verwundbarkeit: Privileg, Gewalt und Solidarität von der Feldforschung bis zur Wissenschaft

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EDITORIAL

The current issue of *SJSCA* – the *Swiss Journal of Sociocultural Anthropology / Revue suisse d'anthropologie sociale et culturelle / Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Sozialanthropologie* – brings together a timely collection of articles exploring the themes of vulnerability and migration. Since the first issue of *Ethnologica Helvetica* appeared in 1979, nearly half a century ago, the Swiss Anthropological Association has continued its mission to provide a forum for debate and to push the boundaries of anthropological theory and practice. This issue, the fourth published under the journal's new stewardship, reflects our ongoing commitment to publishing two issues annually and to amplifying the voices of emerging scholars.

The special issue, guest-edited by Wiebke Wiesigel, Pascale Schild, Paola Juan, and Larissa da Silva Araujo – all early-career scholars –, critically engages the concept of reciprocal vulnerability. Their contributions reveal the entangled dynamics of violence and privilege, as well as the solidarities that emerge from fieldwork and academic labour. In an increasingly precarious research environment, marked by unspoken aggressions and structural exclusions – often borne disproportionately by young, Brown, Black, Indigenous, women, and queer researchers – this notion of reciprocal vulnerability urges a rethinking of ethics both in the field and within anthropology at large. By grounding their analyses in shared and relational experiences, the authors offer pathways toward new "practices and possibilities of solidarity in anthropology."

The special feature on *Migration, Representation, and Reflexivity*, edited by Serjara Aleman, Federica Moretti, and Sara Wiederkehr, initiates an intergenerational dialogue on how forms of representation are shaped by political, decolonial, and ethical commitments. Through engaged and reflexive methodologies, the contributions seek to address longstanding misrepresentations and inequalities, while interrogating established disciplinary practices. We are especially pleased to present this collection under the journal's new "Special Feature" format — an editorial initiative designed to spotlight shorter contributions drawn from research in progress. With another Special Feature already in development for the next issue, this format signals our ongoing commitment to creating space for emerging scholarly conversations. These projects are curated by the current research section, which continues its work of accompanying PhD candidates and early career researchers through the often complex stages of publication.

In the spirit of imagining a transformative anthropology, the final section of this issue features the Ascona Transformation Charter, an initiative spearheaded by the Interface Commission of the Swiss Anthropological Association, in collaboration with the European Association of Social Anthropologists. The 2024 Charter sets forth a series of principles, commitments, and values designed to prompt urgent reflection on anthropology's role and responsibility amid today's converging planetary crises. We are proud to contribute to this ongoing conversation and to offer the journal as a space for collective debate, critical engagement, and envisioning the future of the discipline.

Taken together, these contributions reaffirm the relevance of anthropological theory while foregrounding the importance of diversity in experiences, perspectives, and position-

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alities. *SJSCA* remains committed to making space for these voices and to nurturing the critical engagements that will shape the future of the field.

Lastly, we want to warmly thank several departing members of the board whose career paths are taking them in new directions. We extend our deep gratitude to Barbara Waldis, who contributed to multiple sections of the journal since 1998; to Sibylle Lustenberger, who led the Open Research section from 2019 to 2024; to Sylvain Besançon, who served as co-editor of the book reviews section between 2019 and 2024; and to Joanna Menet, who served as co-editor between 2021 and 2024. Thank you for your commitment and for sharing your expertise with us over the years.

Filipe Calvão and Matthieu Bolay, co-editors SJSCA

SPECIAL ISSUE / DOSSIER / DOSSIER

RECIPROCAL VULNERABILITY

Violence, Privilege, and Solidarity From Fieldwork to Academia

Guest editors:

Wiebke Wiesigel, University of Neuchâtel

Pascale Schild, University of Bern

Paola Juan, University of Lausanne

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RECIPROCAL VULNERABILITY

Violence, Privilege, and Solidarity From Fieldwork to Academia

Introduction

Pascale Schild, Wiebke Wiesigel, Paola Juan, and Larissa da Silva Araujo[1]

Abstract

In this special issue, we seek to uncover the vulnerabilities of researchers in anthropological fieldwork and academia, tracing their political and epistemological potential for the creation of ethnographic knowledge that is based on practices of reciprocity and solidarity. We bring together contributions that explore how anthropologists recover from various experiences of discomfort, harm, and violence by creating bonds of care and support with others, including interlocutors and other researchers, that critically shape and reshape their perspectives and the knowledge they create. Vulnerabilities are powerful and revealing encounters with what makes us human in an entangled and unequal world. Building on reflexive and feminist anthropology, we introduce the concept of "reciprocal vulnerability", recognizing that vulnerabilities are relational, shifting, and situational experiences and positionalities that can connect people across differences and inequalities, allowing for new forms of exchange and reciprocity to emerge and thrive in fieldwork and anthropology more generally.

Keywords: *vulnerability*, *ethnographic fieldwork*, *academia*, *reciprocity*, *privilege*, *solidarity*, *care*

Introduction

Vulnerability is a controversial concept in anthropology and cognate disciplines (see Ferrarese 2016). While it is used to focus on the structures and conditions of human exposure to violence and harm, the notion has also been criticized for reducing vulnerable people and communities to the position of passive victims who supposedly lack agency and therefore need to be rescued by more powerful others (Marino and Faas 2020). In this special issue, we seek to move beyond such victimization and its critique by conceptualizing vulnerability as an embodied and ambivalent human experience, which is not only about social or bodily weakness but also involves what might be called the strength of the weak. With Judith Butler (2004; 2020), we contend that vulnerability is about social suffering and precarity, but also intimately linked to the human capacity and willingness to persist and heal from all forms of violence. We want to trace this capacity to repair a shattered world in the everyday

[1] Pascale Schild and Wiebke Wiesigel are the lead authors of the introduction, with contributions from Paola Juan and Larissa da Silva Araujo.

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lives, relationships, and practices of anthropologists experiencing vulnerability in ethnographic fieldwork and the university beyond. Our aim is to uncover the political and epistemological potential of vulnerabilities and to explore how anthropologists recover from trauma, injury, and heartbreak by creating bonds of care and solidarity with others that crucially shape and reshape their perspectives and the knowledge they create.

The authors of this collection explore researchers' diverse experiences of structural, physical, symbolic, and institutional vulnerability and violence, both in the field and in academia, which manifest themselves in multiple and ambivalent emotions, including failure, shame, guilt, anger, fear, insecurity, irritation, but also empathy and a sense of togetherness and belonging. Common to all the contributions is a feeling of discomfort, dismay, or even outrage at how researchers' vulnerabilities are ignored or reproduced by academic institutional practices, including research, teaching, and publishing.

With Ruth Behar (1996), we argue that anthropologists are often both politically engaged witnesses of human suffering as well as vulnerable observers whose fieldwork and writing are deeply entangled with their own lives and histories, including painful experiences. Such personal entanglements of fieldwork and of anthropology in general have been increasingly recognized in recent decades, leading to reflexive and relational ethnographic knowledge creation (Behar 1996; 2021; Mahmood 2008; Theidon 2014; Weiss 2023; Walter et al. 2024).

At the same time debates about engaged anthropology (Scheper-Hughes 1995; Low and Merry 2010; Ortner 2016) widely assume that anthropologists are privileged, not only as witnesses to human events and suffering, but also because of their advantageous position in structures of race, class, caste, and gender, which gives them both the power and responsibility to speak out against forms of oppression and injustice. While recognizing the privileges of anthropologists in relation to the lives of research participants, these debates largely ignore researchers' own vulnerabilities as well as the growing diversity of research positionalities more generally (see Berry et al. 2017; Juan, this issue).

As a growing body of literature shows (Thurmann 2020; Sikic Micanovic, Stelko, and Sakic 2020; Markowitz 2021; Nair Ambujam 2021; Schild 2021), researchers' vulnerabilities are often silenced in academia, dismissed as individual experiences, professional failures, and personal weaknesses rather than being recognized for what they are: the result of the indeterminacies of fieldwork combined with a researcher's positionality both in the field and in the university—a position based on race, gender, ethnicity, class, caste, sexual orientation, disability, and age.

We argue that anthropologists are not always in a privileged position that protects them from harm and enables them to stand up against the violence they experience on their own bodies or those of research participants and colleagues. In certain situations, they are vulnerable and condemned to silence. Therefore, we see the need to examine the privileges, power, and ethical responsibilities of anthropologists together with their vulnerabilities and experiences of powerlessness, as both privilege and vulnerability shape the positionalities of researchers and their "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1988).

As disturbing and traumatizing as experiences of vulnerability can be for anthropologists, we propose that they be understood not as mere obstacles to research and the creation of

knowledge, but as critical, powerful, and revealing encounters with what makes us human in a world shaped by social and political power disparities.

Vulnerabilities can connect people and places, enabling new perspectives and relationships, including practices of solidarity across social and political divides. We argue that human exposure to violence and harm involves multiple, situational, and shifting experiences, entangled with power relations and inequalities between people, groups, and institutions. At the same time, vulnerability is relational in the sense that it is existentially shared by human beings, providing possibilities for empathizing with others and forging bonds of care and support, as shown by several authors in this collection (Jousset; Juan; Nguyen, this issue). We introduce the concept of "reciprocal vulnerability" to show how experiences of vulnerability can connect us with others across social and political differences, allowing for new forms of exchange and mutuality to emerge and thrive in fieldwork and in anthropology more generally.

In what follows, we critically engage with discussions of privilege and ethical responsibility in anthropology, where the vulnerabilities of anthropologists have been largely ignored. We then turn to the silences within academic institutions, where a narrow understanding of research ethics aims to protect universities rather than vulnerable and traumatized researchers. Through an overview of the individual contributions, we then discuss our understanding of reciprocal vulnerability in more detail, showing how authors here draw on the concept to relate their experiences of vulnerability and violence to those of research participants, and to trace how vulnerabilities can be shared across differences, inspiring forms of reciprocity and solidarity in fieldwork and the university. We conclude this introduction by tracing some of the ways in which the concept of reciprocal vulnerability relates to further debates about ethics, care, and solidarity in anthropology.

Vulnerability and Privilege in Ethnographic Fieldwork

Vulnerability, broadly conceptualized as the exposure to harm (Butler 2020), is a constitutive part of ethnographic fieldwork and academia for many anthropologists, including the authors and guest editors of this collection who are all women and early-career researchers in European universities. At the same time, their experiences of vulnerability vary widely. While some of the vulnerabilities discussed here and in the literature result from specific events of rupture, including extraordinary experiences of violence and abuse during fieldwork (Bugnon; Fuchs, this issue; Mahmood 2008; Schneider 2020; Nair Ambujam 2021), others take less spectacular forms and emerge from ordinary relationships with interlocutors in the field (Jousset; Juan; Nguyen; Woensdregt, this issue).

Inspired by the writing culture debate of the 1980s and early 1990s, anthropologists have increasingly embraced their vulnerabilities and all sorts of uncomfortable experiences and awkward feelings during fieldwork, creating more reflexive and relational forms of ethnographic knowledge. In 2009, Amy Pollard's article "Field of screams" described a wide range of unpleasant experiences and emotions that she and colleagues throughout the UK went through while carrying out ethnographic fieldwork. From loneliness to feeling unwell to

harassment, Pollard shows that experiences of vulnerability in the field are not exceptional or a sign of failure but are inherent to the serendipitous nature of ethnographic fieldwork. Expanding on this understanding, serendipity, as Julie Giabiconi (2013) argues, does not necessarily lead to success in fieldwork, but rather is a source of discomfort. In this sense, we stress the epistemological potential of listening to such emotions (Jousset, Juan, Woensdregt,this issue).

In a recent interview marking the 25th anniversary of Ruth Behar's *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996), the author explains that she wrote the book at a time when researchers believed that "by concealing [their] presence, [their] feelings of vulnerability as an observer, and how the social world [they] observe connects with [their] own life, [they] would supposedly be 'unobtrusive' and 'neutral' and 'more objective'" (Behar 2021). We agree with Behar that this has undoubtedly changed. Together with the authors gathered here, however, we observe that at some point in our careers we have all struggled with fears of failure because we felt we could not live up to professional expectations, were not "objective enough," or were "too close" to research participants (see Juan, this issue). In our time of reflexive anthropology, we wonder where these fears of academic credibility come from.

We assume that not all experiences of vulnerability can be written about, but only those that conform to certain notions of "good" fieldwork (see Nair Ambujam 2021). Anthropologists, for example, often write about initial difficulties and forms of clumsiness in the field that they can ultimately translate into ethnographic "success stories": entertaining heroic tales of how they successfully turned adversities into opportunities to create anthropological knowledge. But when it comes to disclosing and writing about more painful experiences and unresolved feelings of guilt, grief and regret, broken hearts and wounded bodies, researchers are reluctant and wary. As several authors in this special issue and beyond point out, it is difficult to talk about vulnerabilities, let alone reflect on them in an academic paper (Fuchs; Juan, this issue). There is also a specific temporality at work in writing about experiences of violence, a slow pace in uncovering and understanding what has happened to oneself and others (see Bugnon, this issue; Schild 2021). The reluctance to disclose one's suffering shows that "unveiling" vulnerability in academia may come at a personal cost (Fuchs; Juan, this issue). This is partly because anthropology is still practiced and taught in many universities today in ways that encourage students and academics to suppress painful and violent experiences during fieldwork (see The Fieldwork Initiative 2024).

While silences often indicate an ability to turn away from one's own complicity in power relations and in the oppression of less privileged others, engaged anthropology has come to see its primary role as breaking such complicit silences and speaking out against injustices. For Nancy Scheper-Hughes, the act of witnessing "positions the anthropologist inside human events as a responsive, reflexive, and morally committed being" (1995, 419). However, her ethical claims about anthropological research assume that researchers are inherently privileged in relation to their field and the people they work with.[2] The privilege of

[2] The ethical responsibility ascribed to anthropologists who "study up" is not so different from that of those who do research with the oppressed, and lies in witnessing how their privileged interlocutors are implicated in causing human suffering (Low and Merry 2010).

anthropologists as witnesses of human suffering and struggles comes with an "ethical obligation to identify the ills in a spirit of solidarity" (1995, 418–19). Yet, such an ethical obligation can only be taken up by those anthropologists who have the power to speak out against forms of oppression and injustice. In other words, silences are not always a sign of privilege, but also result from vulnerability, trauma, and fear of violent retribution. As Maya Berry and her colleagues point out (Berry et al. 2017), the assumption about researchers' privileged position and related ethical and political responsibilities tends to ignore the fact that anthropologists, and particularly Brown, Black, Indigenous, women, and queer researchers, can also be, and often are, vulnerable and exposed to harm and violence during fieldwork in ways that make it impossible for them to speak out.

We therefore examine how vulnerabilities, in their various forms and entanglements with privilege and power relations, shape the way anthropologists do ethnographic fieldwork and co-create anthropological knowledge, and how the exposure to harm makes anthropologists do things otherwise and see things in other lights. The authors draw on different notions of vulnerability and privilege, pointing to relational variations and diverse experiences of vulnerability and privilege. For some authors, their privilege in relation to the field and interlocutors was entangled with forms of vulnerability and was "weaponized" against them by academic publishers and peer reviewers (Fuchs, this issue), or led to feelings of uncertainty, powerlessness, and guilt (Bugnon; Jousset, Juan; Woensdregt, this issue). For others, however, it is the situational suspension of the privilege ascribed to white and relatively wealthy researchers from the Global North that exposes them to physical violence and abuse in the field, in many of the same ways as their local research participants (Bugnon, this issue). In contrast to violent and harmful experiences of vulnerability, Phuong Nguyen (this issue), who shares her interlocutors' structural position in terms of age, nationality, class, and level of education, shows how intimate practices of reciprocity and friendship emerge when anthropologists share facets of themselves with interlocutors which go beyond professional self-image.

What becomes clear from all contributions is that vulnerabilities bear an epistemological and political potential, allowing anthropologists to engage in ways of knowing that would otherwise not be possible and, therefore, to counter structures of "epistemic injustice" (Fricker 2007). After all, anthropologists witness vulnerabilities and forms of violence during fieldwork not as passive and distant researchers but as sensible and empathetic human beings who regularly end up feeling *with* their interlocutors and sharing some of their painful and traumatizing experiences (Jousset; Juan; Nguyen, this issue). This relationality and "sharing" of vulnerabilities can also inspire practices of mutual care and solidarity between researchers and interlocutors. However, before discussing practices of reciprocity and solidarity in more detail, we now turn to vulnerabilities and forms of violence in academic institutions.

Precarity and Risk in Neoliberal Academia

Academia has often been portrayed as an ivory tower in which privileged individuals follow their passion while being sheltered from the struggles and power relations that shape society

at large, without much reflection on the living and working conditions these researchers are subjected to. Feminist scholars in particular have deconstructed this myth by showing how discrimination based on gender, race, class, and sexual orientation permeates the university and its institutions. In addition, the neoliberal restructuring of academia has increased forms of precarity, affecting researchers' bodies and minds (see Gill 2016; Mountz et al. 2015). As a result of the ongoing neoliberalization, universities and researchers are increasingly placed in competition with each other. At the same time, precarity in academia is unevenly distributed among university staff and affiliated researchers, rendering early-career academics particularly vulnerable and exposed to exploitation and abuses (see Pritchard and Edwards 2023). While contending with short-term contracts and social and personal insecurities, they are also under increased pressure to "publish or perish" (see also Fuchs, this issue). Such competitive environment often creates an erosion of solidarity between peers in academia, and leaves space for the weaponization of vulnerabilities and other harmful behaviours, such as moral harassment, mobbing, or bullying. When individuals lose sight of the human fragility and precarity of their colleagues – notwithstanding the fact that psychological distress is widespread in academia – , individual interests end up prevailing over acts of care for one another.

As elsewhere, universities in Switzerland are hierarchical institutions in which supervisors often act as gatekeepers for junior and precarious employed researchers, leading to dependencies in which early-career researchers must not only conduct research and teach courses but also constantly prove themselves to their seniors as "good" academics, worthy of being employed, recommended to colleagues, and involved in publications and the organization of conferences. As a result, doctoral and non-tenured postdoctoral researchers and those from other precarious, underrepresented, and disadvantaged backgrounds in academia are particularly vulnerable to harassment, bullying, and sexual abuse (Pritchard and Edwards 2023; Ahmed 2021). They fear that speaking up against hierarchies and forms of oppression within universities and in other academic contexts, including publishing (see Fuchs, this issue) and the awarding of grants, could lead to the end of their academic careers (see Schwarzenbach 2016; Furger 2018; Noack 2018), as has happened to academics who dared to complain (see Ahmed 2021). At the same time, researchers are often unable to speak openly about their fears and experiences of violence as their academic credibility can be contested. It is precisely this silencing and being silenced that are produced by the neoliberal, patriarchal, and racist structures of the university and its institutions, but also reproduced by universities individualizing the vulnerabilities of researchers and making them appear exceptional.

Anthropologists are in the situation that they must contend with both precarities and silences in neoliberal academia and the indeterminacies and vulnerabilities of fieldwork. Here, universities adopt a paradoxical approach to vulnerabilities and risks. Risk and vulnerability are closely related concepts. In institutional contexts such as universities, risk means the potential for harm and has become the primary objective of security and safety management guidelines and assessment procedures. In relation to vulnerability, risk can be conceptualized as the probability that vulnerability will result in harm.

In 2021, the Ethical and Deontological Think Tank, a commission of the Swiss Anthropological Association, conducted a survey to understand how universities and anthropology

institutes in Switzerland deal with researchers' risks in fieldwork. The survey shows that risks and vulnerabilities are rarely addressed in discussions with supervisors and formal exchanges between colleagues. While security and safety guidelines and risk assessments can be useful in raising awareness and initiating conversations between students, researchers, and supervisors about potential risks and resources prior to fieldwork, they do not guarantee that harm will not occur (Johansson 2015; Nair Ambujam 2021; Schneider 2020). Given the "impossible task of controlling the unpredictability of human engagement" (Schneider 2020, 174) that is at the core of anthropological fieldwork, risk assessment procedures are meant to protect institutions rather than their researchers. If harm does occur during fieldwork, these procedures enable universities to pass on responsibility to the individual researcher, blaming them for not following security and safety guidelines and sometimes even demanding that they disclose their traumatizing experiences of violence in order to assess their professionalism (Schneider 2020).

As feminist scholars have noted many times and the contributions curated here maintain once again, survivors of violence must not be blamed but given care and support. Pascale Bugnon (this issue) and many other anthropologists, including those who started The Fieldwork Initiative (2024), remind us that universities need to work towards an institutional ethics of care, addressing the risks and vulnerabilities of researchers in more substantial and inclusive ways in academic teaching, research, administration, and publishing. Therefore, we insist on the responsibility of institutions to support and care for researchers who have experienced violence and harm in the field, while defending the "right to risk" (see Schneider 2020) of anthropologists to conduct ethnographic fieldwork despite its unpredictability.

Reciprocal Vulnerabilities

Breaking the silences about the vulnerabilities of anthropologists, the contributions to this special issue examine human exposure to harm and violence as a source of connection and mutuality.

Reciprocity in fieldwork relationships is a widely held ideal in anthropology. This notion describes practices of exchange where different parts mutually benefit and where prestige is circulated. Through practices of reciprocity, anthropologists often seek to redress the power disparities between researcher and interlocutor and avoid exploitative forms of anthropological knowledge creation. However, for researchers, the ideal of reciprocal research relationships often comes with ambivalent feelings (von Vacano 2019). In discussing shame, guilt, coercion, insecurity, friendship, belonging, care, and solidarity, authors here point to such emotional ambivalence in fieldwork relationships, which can itself be experienced as a form of vulnerability. They find it difficult to live up to normative expectations of ethical research and to build reciprocal relationships with research participants, replacing hierarchies with more egalitarian forms of exchange and collaboration. While the expectation of the importance of reciprocating can be materially and emotionally difficult to handle (both from researchers and research participants), we believe that the reverse is also true, that vulnerabilities can lead to reciprocal relationships between people and groups, including researchers

and interlocutors. The concept of "reciprocal vulnerability" explores forms of mutual exchange between anthropologists and their research participants based on shared and relational experiences of vulnerability and violence, and to draw from these relationships and relationalities new ethnographic insights into practices and possibilities of solidarity in anthropology.

At the heart of our concept of "reciprocal vulnerability" is the observation that anthropologists are vulnerable and can be exposed to various forms of structural and physical violence (Mahmood 2008; Sikic Micanovic, Stelko, and Sakic 2020; Markowitz 2021), and that these vulnerabilities are what connects them with interlocutors as well as with many other human beings (Berry et al. 2017). With Judith Butler (2004; 2020), we understand vulnerability as a universally shared human condition: we are all vulnerable due to our bodies being dependent on each other for support (Altermark 2023). At the same time, we recognize that vulnerabilities are individually experienced and unequally distributed, depending on the location of individuals and groups within local and global structures of power. Therefore, the concept of "reciprocal vulnerability" is permeated by the tension between commonalities and differences, between sharing and not-sharing of vulnerabilities and privileges: we are all vulnerable but in different and unequal ways. We argue that experiences of vulnerability and violence open an epistemic horizon, as they offer a way of knowing and relating our vulnerable bodies to those of other human beings.

In our thinking about reciprocal vulnerabilities, we are inspired by existential anthropology (Jackson 2005), which assumes a shared humanity between researcher and interlocutor, and related attempts to bring anthropologists' emotions out of the methodological margins of ethnographic fieldwork and to consider their potential to offer new insights (Davies 2010). In this way, we seek to realize the epistemological potential of vulnerabilities by relating our experiences of vulnerability as anthropologists to those of our research participants, exploring their entanglements and overlaps without ignoring the differences and inequalities between these experiences.

Authors of this collection discuss various uncomfortable, disturbing, and traumatizing experiences in the field and in academia, including emotional distress (Fuchs; Hänni; Jousset; and Juan, this issue). In one way or another, they all examine what these vulnerabilities "do" with them as anthropologists and their work, and how they connect them to the lives of research participants, inspires forms of mutual care and support. As Butler argues, vulnerability is a constellation that "only makes sense in light of an embodied set of social relations, including practices of resistance" (Butler 2020, 131; 2016). In other words, vulnerability is never only about weakness, but also about the possibility of gaining strength by bringing people together to confront oppressive conditions. Drawing on the experience of the violent death of an interlocutor and friend during fieldwork, Pascale Schild (2021; 2025) shows how, in the face of trauma and violence, anthropologists and their interlocutors can turn to practices of care and solidarity for healing and survival.

In this special issue, the authors discuss diverse and ambivalent relationships that emerge from the intimate connections between researchers' uncomfortable, disturbing, or painful experiences and the vulnerabilities of the people and groups with whom they work and interact in their everyday lives. For Lise Woensdregt, the feeling of uncertainty, shame, and guilt

about her interlocutors' financial expectations, combined with her and anthropology's reluctance to compensate research participants with money, ultimately allowed for a better understanding of the vulnerable lives and care networks of her research participants in Kenya. These networks included her. As a white woman from a privileged Dutch background conducting research among relatively poor queer male sex workers in Nairobi, her position placed her in the role of a friend and a person to whom her interlocutors felt they could rightfully turn for material support. In the context of psychiatric institutions in Switzerland, Paola Juan shows how her personal experience as family member of someone who suffers from long-term psychological difficulties not only served as an emotional driving force for her research but also allowed her to build relationships with people and groups to whom she otherwise would not have had access, and to feel and share their anger and guilt. In a similar way, pointing to the blurred boundaries between a researcher's professional and personal life, Phuong Nguyen traces how she entered vulnerable relationships of friendship, replacing outdated expectations of professional "distance" with reflexivity and ethical research aimed at "giving back" to interlocutors-turned-friends. Fieldwork in all these contexts is fraught with uncertainty, as both unequal relationships and friendships are processual and negotiable, and therefore a potential source of anxiety for both researchers and interlocutors. However, instead of understanding these vulnerabilities as obstacles to fieldwork and the creation of knowledge, we argue for embracing the uncomfortable and disturbing experiences and emotions of fear, guilt, and uncertainty as reflexive and ethical research practices. Annemarie Hänni takes us to the heart of the "vulnerable observer" (Behar 1996) by showing how reflexivity is itself a vulnerable practice that constantly confronts anthropologists with irritations and epistemological uncertainties: how do I know what I know about myself, my field, and my interlocutors? Exploring ways of knowing and doing ethnographic reflexivity collectively, Hänni's contribution points to alternative and relational practices of interpreting ethnographic material, in which researchers support each other in making sense of fieldnotes and reading between the lines. In her discussion of reciprocal vulnerabilities, Amanda Jousset reflects on how, in reading her emotionally charged fieldnotes, she suffered a "vicarious trauma" from witnessing physical and symbolic forms of violence against her interlocutors during fieldwork. While her vulnerable and emotional entanglements with the lives of her research participants helped her to understand their suffering more deeply, she struggled to find ways to write about these vulnerabilities beyond "classical" academic representation. Pascale Bugnon draws on her traumatic experiences of violence in the field to show how academic silences and lack of institutional support from the university exacerbated her distress. However, when she discovered similar personal accounts of violence by anthropologists to which she could relate her own experience, a process of recovery and healing began to take shape. In discussing the entangled vulnerabilities of anthropologists in relation to fieldwork and the university, her contribution is also a powerful call for the creation of an institutional ethics of care in anthropology. However, as Sandhya Fuchs reminds us, not all vulnerabilities are reciprocal and enable connections across differences. Rather, neoliberal academia with its pressure to "publish or perish" and the lack of "care review" (Allegra Lab 2022) has individualized vulnerabilities, essentialized differences, and disconnected academics, limiting the possibilities for relationships of care and solidarity between researchers.

In promoting reflexive research practices, the conceptual lens of reciprocal vulnerabilities calls for an understanding of research ethics that does not only commit us to "do no harm" to research participants, but also takes seriously the responsibilities to care for others and ourselves in an entangled world. The concept of reciprocal vulnerability allows researchers to understand themselves as vulnerable human beings who depend on others for support. By recognizing vulnerability as diverse and relational rather than representing identical experiences, anthropologists can discover and invent social and emotional forms of reciprocity across differences both in the field and in academia, creating anthropological knowledge beyond colonial and extractive research methods and the inequalities of the neoliberal world we live in (see Harrison et al. 2016).

Solidarity and Ethics of Care from Fieldwork to the University

While thinking about vulnerability in fieldwork and academia raises questions about risk, violence, and privilege, a less explored dimension of human exposure to harm is the possibilities it may offer for researchers and research participants to explore and nurture ethics of care and solidarity in anthropology. Here we see how our discussion can inspire further research and debate in moral anthropology (Fassin 2012) and the anthropology of care and ethics.[3]

The project materialized here also emerged in response to the challenges we experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when our "normal" everyday life as researchers, as well as that of many other people around the world, was severely disrupted. In this context, the need to think about care and solidarity appeared to be more crucial than in "normal" times. For some of us, the pandemic hit while we were in the middle of fieldwork, causing severe distress and uncertainties about our personal and professional future. One of us was conducting research in Ecuador, a country with many shocking images in the media of people dying in the streets. In April 2020, she left on a humanitarian flight organized by her country's embassy. All this unfolded without her university checking how she and other researchers doing fieldwork abroad were coping with the situation, not to mention offering help and advice. Checking in on colleagues who were also confined in other countries via social media became a small but important act of caring. While researchers felt vulnerable, they also supported one another where institutions utterly failed (Cîrstea, Johnson, and Phiri 2024). This is one of the various instances where care and solidarity emerged from "shared" vulnerabilities and relational experiences of distress and uncertainty (see Cox et al. 2024). As David Loher and Sabine Strasser (2019) point out in the introduction to a special issue on precari-

[3] While the focus of the contributions is not on ethics but on vulnerabilities and related forms of reciprocity, we recognize how anthropological perspectives on ethics can deepen our understanding of ethnographic research and, in particular, research ethics. As anthropologists of the "ethical turn" in the discipline have argued (see Lambek 2010; Fassin 2012; Laidlaw 2014; 2023; Keane 2016), the ethical is not an ephemeral and separate dimension, but a constitutive part of social life, including the everyday practices of fieldwork. Therefore, research ethics must be seen not only as a set of rules and normative claims and expectations, but also as ordinary ethical practices that emerge from the necessities and demands of sometimes adverse circumstances both in the field and in academia, including experiences of vulnerability and violence.

ties in academia, acts of care and support among researchers show the contradictory entanglements of individual vulnerability with possibilities for collective practices of resistance in and against the neoliberal university. While academics are exposed to "new forms of vulnerability, exclusion and exploitation resulting in precarious lives, they are also offered (...) new professional networks as well as transnational networks expressing solidarity and critique" (Loher and Strasser 2019, 7).

In line with current debates and feminist perspectives in social anthropology and neighboring disciplines on political solidarity, we conceptualize solidarity as relations of support and care forged through common struggles against all forms of oppression and injustice in the world (Scholz 2008). Solidarity, including care, is an ethical project. For a long time, feminist scholars have claimed to see care as "the ontological ground of ethics" (Mattingly and McKearney 2023, 561) because humans are relational, dependent, and vulnerable beings. In anthropology, understandings of care have been complicated by ethnographies showing how practices of care, particularly state and institutional care interventions (Ticktin 2011), can involve hierarchy, coercion, and neglect rather than reciprocity and responsibility. At the same time, the recognition of unequal care relations has led to new anthropological perspectives that undermine the common assumption that ethics of care are always based on equality.

While anthropologists of ethics have debated how care and other forms of exchange are and can be ethical in social relationships, including research relationships, marked by inequalities and dependencies (Mattingly and McKearney 2023), scholars of political solidarity have engaged in controversies over the conceptualization of difference and commonality to understand relationships between members of "solidarity groups" (Scholz 2008). What links these debates and controversies, we argue, is the question of the possibility or impossibility of reciprocity and solidarity across differences and inequalities. For some (Glick Schiller 2016; 2020; Rakopoulos 2016), solidarities and related forms of care are necessarily built on pre-existing commonalities and shared experiences and fears of dispossession and suffering. Conversely, other researchers (see Eckert 2019; 2023) argue that solidarity is not only an outcome but also a driving force for bridging differences, responding to interdependencies, and creating new commonalities, as it allows people to develop trust and empathy and share vulnerabilities despite—and across—different and unequal experiences.

As for engaged research practices, we see the possibility that solidarities in anthropology allow for more responsive and responsible practices of care to emerge when anthropologists recognize their vulnerabilities together with their privileges, including their complicated entanglements with the global power relations that unequally shape their lives and those of interlocutors and colleagues. From the "in-between" position of the "implicated subject" (Rothberg 2019)—neither a victim nor a perpetrator of, nor merely a bystander to, political violence— people can understand how they indirectly contribute to, while benefiting and/or suffering from, inequalities and forms of oppression in the world and work towards their "disengagement from implication" (Rothberg 2019, 145). Solidarities then emerge with the recognition of a global "connectedness that makes us concerned" (Eckert 2019).

Authors in this collection trace "trajectories of solidarity" (Cinalli and Sanhueza 2018) in which positions of power, privilege, and vulnerability shift over time and across contexts,

and "in-betweenness" becomes the relational connection between different and unequal experiences of vulnerability, enabling anthropologists and interlocutors to imagine a shared and implicated human connectedness. This connectedness allows for ethics of care, as it makes humans responsive to, and feeling responsible for, one another. In other words, the "in-betweenness"—of being a researcher *and* a relative (Juan, this issue), a close friend (Nguyen, this issue), a vulnerable witness (Jousset, this issue), a material provider (Woensdregt, this issue), a survivor of violence (Bugnon, this issue), or an observed observer (Hänni, this issue)—is constitutive of the relationality of vulnerabilities and how power can be "momentarily transferred in the research process between research subjects (researchers and other participants)" (Huizinga 2024, 620), leading to new forms of togetherness.

The in-betweenness and shifting of position is what has allowed anthropologists, including our authors, to recognize connections across differences and engage in reciprocal practices of care and solidarity with interlocutors and colleagues, ranging from emotional care (see Nguyen; Juan; Jousset, this issue), to legal advice, to financial support (see Woensdregt, this issue), to political mobilization, to collective reflexivity (see Hänni, this issue) and other forms of collaborative knowledge creation (Asante et al. 2021). Here, we find solidarities emerging from reciprocal vulnerabilities not only through material practices but also through emotions (Luzynski, Caretta, and Tanner 2024). At the same time, emotions and feelings of solidarity and "being concerned" have an analytical strength, as they enable anthropologists to find creative ways of knowing and narrating positionalities, differences, and commonalities, which do justice to different yet related experiences of vulnerability and violence (Jousset; Hänni, this issue; Huizinga 2024).

As Fuchs (this issue) reminds us, vulnerability does not necessarily lead to solidarities and resistance. It may also enforce the status quo and structural differences, which is sometimes a prerequisite for survival and persistence not only in academia or fieldwork, but everyday life in general. However, vulnerability can bring people together and inspire practices of care that allow lives to persist and recover from harm and violence (Candrian and Fortney, 2014). It is from these lives that vulnerabilities potentially emerge as political strength and mobilizing forces for resistance and solidarities aimed at countering forms of oppression and injustice in the world (Butler 2016). Human life is vulnerable. And while there is life without resistance, there is no resistance without life nor, as Veena Das reminds us (Das 2012; see Laugier 2016), without the everyday relationships and practices of care and solidarity that enable human bodies to recover from trauma, harm, and injury (Schild 2025). By uncovering the political, ethical, and epistemological potential of reciprocal relationships based on shared vulnerabilities, we hope to contribute to ethics of care for oneself and others that is conducive to bridging differences and countering inequalities and forms of oppression in anthropology, and in academic institutions more generally.

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ETHNOGRAPHIC INTIMACY

Navigating Friendships and Vulnerabilities in the Field

Phuong Nguyen

Abstract

In recent decades, anthropologists have increasingly recognised the researcher's vulnerability as an inherent and indispensable element of ethnographic field research. This article shares my ethnographic fieldwork experiences navigating the intricate relationships of a coliving facility in Ho Chi Minh City. I argue that emotional engagement within fieldwork relationships—embracing the dual role of researcher and friend—can yield unexpected insights. Nevertheless, there are inherent complexities in negotiating a network of relationships that demand a high degree of emotional resilience, especially for anthropologists conducting research "at home". This article calls on researchers to recognise reciprocal vulnerability not as a weakness, but as an asset for arriving at empathetic understandings of complex social worlds.

Keywords: *friendship as method, ethnographic intimacy, reciprocal vulnerability, anthropology at home, emotional episodes*

"If it weren't for you all, if you had not taken care of me, I would not know what to do. I had imagined the worst when I woke up this morning unable to walk." Nam confided in me as I picked up his medical records and pushed him out of the emergency room. This medical emergency would eventually become a joke, a fond memory of an eventful day. His sudden immobility turned out to be the early onset of hereditary gout. Finally settled and calm—albeit a little giggly, possibly from the joint he had smoked to help ease the pain—Nam looked up to ask if I was okay. I was surprised at the question, considering he was in a much more vulnerable state than me. "I meant emotionally, how is your heart doing?" Nam clarified.

In the days before and after Nam's trip to the emergency ward, I experienced something that marked a breakthrough in my relationship with key interlocutors, something that changed my position, presentation, and understanding of the field: I got my heart broken. While the party involved was not a part of the coliving community I studied, we had spent long hours in conversations in the coliving space with my interlocutors, rendering the experience a part of my "fieldwork". During my last few weeks in Ho Chi Minh City, I was fortunate enough to experience the care of the community I researched. By allowing myself to be vulnerable with my research interlocutors, I secured invaluable research *and* the gift of long-lasting friendship and deep emotional bonds.

This article presents the ethical and methodological conundrum I faced during my residency at a coliving facility, where I studied innovations in the Vietnamese real estate industry. I followed Lisa Tillmann-Healy's (2003) concept of "friendship as method", which calls

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for procedures and processes that build friendship in research communities. Here, I explore the emotional vulnerabilities faced as a researcher in the field. Understanding the reciprocal vulnerabilities between researchers and interlocutors is productive for everyday life in any research setting, not only in work on difficult topics like violence and trauma. By practising the ethics of the ordinary and friendship as method, anthropologists who allow themselves to be vulnerable can benefit from empathetic, emotionally connected ethnographic fieldwork and potential lifelong bonds with their communities.

Vulnerability, Friendship, and Ethnographic Intimacy

Anthropology's primary research methodology, ethnographic fieldwork, can be a mystery to outsiders and insiders alike. Researchers invest time in learning a community's language and culture to gain rapport and insider viewpoints—a close relationship with research informants is always desired (Murchison 2010, 6–7). However, the irony of "how to do" ethnography research, as Randall, Harper, and Rouncefield (2007, 169–70) frame it, is that "no one, no matter how practiced, can tell anyone else, no matter how naive, how to do it", except that the methods are "those of understanding, common sense and goodwill". Methodological texts teach students to "[spend] lots of time (...), learn the language, hang out, do all the everyday things that everyone else does, become inconspicuous by sheer tenaciousness, and stay aware of what's really going on" (Bernard 2006, 345), act and adapt as you normally would in an unfamiliar social situation (Spradley 1980). Most researchers enter fieldwork with these propositions and a "just do it and you will know it" mentality, along with important technical skills for interviews, observations, and note-taking.

Anthropology of Emotions and Reciprocal Vulnerability

The reflexive turn of the 1970s–1980s and the affective turn of the 1990s transformed the way anthropologists conduct research. The past two decades have also seen anthropology, especially feminist anthropology, responding to a growing call to acknowledge emotions as an indispensable element by "placing emotion onto an epistemologically relevant plane" (Davies 2010, 3) and including emotional self-reflexivity in anthropological methodological training (Spencer 2010). Ruth Behar's (1996) seminal work challenged traditional detached observation methods and advocated for vulnerability as an asset to research. Contemporary anthropologists now talk about their various experiences with loss, trauma, and discomfort. Emotional discomfort is the most common response to what Katz (2019, 23) calls "the shame of the inevitably naked researcher". Anthropologists have also reported intense feelings of hatred (Hage 2010) or guilt about the stark disparity of their socioeconomic situations with the researched (Lücking 2019; von Vacano 2019). In entering and leaving the field, some researchers experience disappointment and shock (Della Rocca 2019) or a disconnectedness from interlocutors (Hughes and Walter 2021).

As ethnographic training has been accused of being based on the experience of a white, Western, male and able-bodied researcher, many aspects of researchers' vulnerabilities are rarely addressed in preparing them for the field. Accounts of researchers, especially women anthropologists, being subject to sexual harassment, rape, and discrimination are also abundant (Ambujam 2021; Hanson and Richards 2017; Pollard 2009; Sanson and Le Breton 2020). Many who study injustice and oppression feel helplessness when witnessing the violence committed against their research participants, experiencing reciprocal vulnerability to what their interlocutors face (Schild 2021). Researchers sometimes resort to establishing an emotional distance from interlocutors or even retreat from the field in response to personal attacks (Lücking 2019) or intrusive surveillance and fabrications (Hughes and Walter 2021). I personally know researchers who have faced imprisonment, interrogation, and death threats on account of criticism of governments. Many who experienced and endured trauma (Reyes-Foster and Lester 2019) resist seeking help; others intellectualise their traumatic experiences in the guise of academic rigour (Beckett 2019).

However, vulnerability manifests as helplessness, anger, fear, trauma, and loss in dire conditions *and* in everyday life. Acknowledging that the researcher is also vulnerable—sometimes almost comically so—makes them more relatable and allows them to build solidarity (Fuchs 2021). Yet, vulnerability also exists in what Veena Das calls "the everyday life of the human" and the "ordinary other" (Das 2007; cited in Laugier 2016). In caring for the ordinary, we notice the vulnerable in the ordinary and the fact that we are all vulnerable (Laugier 2016).

Friendship as Method

The anthropology of friendship has centred around its autonomous, voluntary, and candid nature, with many arguing that friendship is rooted in both affection and homophilic and reciprocal fundamentals. We tend to befriend those who are similar and with whom we have a mutually beneficial relationship (Bell and Coleman 1999). The paradox of friendship, as Julian Pitt-Rivers (2016 [1983]) notes, is that while a reciprocal obligation beyond emotion is implied, the demand for return cannot be expressed; yet, if the counter-gesture is not made, offence is taken. The tacit agreement of friendship is that all parties should demonstrate an implicit reciprocity in contribution.

The processes of building friendships and conducting ethnographic fieldwork share many similarities. In applying "friendship as method", Tillmann-Healy (2003) advocated for a process of qualitative data-gathering that revolves around friendship-building—albeit employing the usual research methods. This method joins academic and personal discourses with a unique perspective on social life. The intensity of the relationships created through this research means that doing fieldwork through the practice of friendship "carries all the risks that friendship does" and "[because] we must reveal and invest so much of ourselves, researchers are exposed and vulnerable, which means we can be profoundly disappointed, frustrated, or hurt" (Tillman-Healy 2003, 741). As "[the] bottom-line about ethnography is that it is about forming relationships [and] the search for connection within and across borders" (Behar 1999, 477), friendship as method "ultimately allow[s] us to appreciate and understand the lived and intersubjective nature of our ethnographic fieldwork" (Mackinlay and Bartleet 2012, 85).

Helen Owton and Jacquelyn Allen-Collison (2014, 285) characterised friendship as method, not methodology, due to its philosophical goal of "actively challenging, disrupting, and sometimes undermining what can be a considerable power imbalance between researcher and participant". A project employing friendship imposes obligations and demands on the ethnographer as we "engage others' humanity, struggles, and oppression, (...) anyone who takes on this sort of project must be emotionally strong and willing to face pressure, resistance, backlash, and perhaps even violence" (Tillman-Healy 2003, 743). Ethnographic intimacy becomes a productive element of fieldwork, not just in qualitative data collection, but also in the ethical exercise of friendship. The ethics of friendship is not a guise to gain more access to data (Ellis 2007); rather, we approach our fieldwork relationships with "a stance of hope, caring, justice, and even love" (Tillman-Healy 2003, 735). The following section discusses emotions and vulnerability in my fieldwork using friendship as method, including the emotional labour afforded by and between the researcher and interlocutors.

Being *At Home* in the Field

My research project examined "innovation" as a panacea for social issues in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, as promoted by international development discourses and the Vietnamese government. I focussed my study on the sharing economy, specifically space-sharing startups known as Space-as-a-Service (SpaaS) businesses. Therefore, I sought out membership in coworking and coliving spaces in two large cities, Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC).[1] Coworking and coliving spaces provide technology-enabled flexible solutions to disrupt traditional real estate markets and working-living arrangements around the world. They promise community and a future that ushers in "the end of urban loneliness" (Coldwell 2019; Spinuzzi 2012). These co-spaces have proliferated in Viet Nam since governmental efforts have focussed on entrepreneurship and innovation, nurturing startup communities, young professionals, and the general public. The majority of coliving inhabitants are young (in their 20s and 30s), tech-savvy, white-collar professionals and intellectuals working in entrepreneurial, flexible, and digitally immersed sectors, a significant element of the growing Vietnamese middle class (Nguyen 2023). As a Vietnamese national doing "anthropology at home" (Peirano 1998), these demographic categorisations helped me easily position myself as a member of the "communities" I set out to study.

I found one such community in my first coliving space, Modern Hamlet, the first of its kind in Viet Nam.[2] Modern Hamlet coliving space is situated in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC)—still colloquially known as *Sài Gòn*—the biggest city and economic hub of Viet Nam. Nested in three old French colonial-era villas, it was renovated shortly before the

[1] The spelling of "coworking" and "coliving" – as hyphenated or not – has been an ongoing debate for the past few decades in the industry. While most of the time the two spellings ("coworking/coliving" versus "co-working/co-living") have been used interchangeably, I chose to use the spelling with neither a hyphen nor a space to 1. follow the style that many of my interlocutors choose when they write these words in English and 2. argue that the subtle intentional misspelling denotes its distancing from other, older forms of co-working and -living, that they represent an innovation. A short industry explanation can be found in Meunier (2018).

[2] Pseudonym of the coliving space.

pandemic to embrace the vision of an urban village. Modern Hamlet was unlike any other residential area I visited. Its biophilic design, open architecture, and ambient tranquillity contrasted with the bustling traffic on the main street barely a hundred metres away. Behind a card-secured gate, the coliving space boasted a serene and welcoming feeling, surrounded by the canopies of decades-old trees. A sign at the gate relaying the company's values and mission immediately caught my attention:

> *Modern Hamlet is a modern community living concept built on an idea: bringing like-minded people into a contemporary living lifestyle, individual homes amidst collective spaces that can yield maximum freedom, connection and creativity (...) We believe there is nothing matters above the sense of belonging, where peace of mind and aspirations are cultivated to nurture one's path, together with the community they are happy to live with, excited to participate in and passionate to contribute to enrich lives of others.*

These words on a humble wooden plank gave me new-found inspiration and set the tone for the following weeks. Before arriving at Modern Hamlet, I had been frustrated with the fairly shallow insights gathered from other co-spaces. The narrative of "building community" was rehearsed by operators, staff, and members alike. Up to this point, I had principally established professional relationships with these interlocutors via interviews, conversation, and participant observation, as both a researcher and a "coworker" sharing their workspace. I had envisioned a doctoral project that would combine economic anthropology and organisational ethnography of these start-up businesses. I remember expressing disappointment with my supervisors that my research had been more economic than anthropological; I was advised to explore other avenues and kinds of relationships.

Choosing to study Modern Hamlet was a leap of faith. What started as a one-week stay turned into two extended trips, lasting one and two months respectively, followed by shorter stints of personal visits squeezed in whenever I was back in the country. Myriad factors help explain why my ethnographic experiences at Modern Hamlet were starkly different from previous co-spaces. It might be the intensity of living in close quarters and the sheer spontaneity of encounters that allowed me to spend more time in a relaxed environment facilitated by the design of communal areas in the coliving. The staff also went the extra mile to ensure the quality of the service because, for them, I was a resident before I was a researcher. Furthermore, Modern Hamlet's founders frequently visited the space. However, in retrospect, it was the friendships I made with the unique constellations of people there, most significantly with some of the longest-staying residents, that offered important insights and answered many questions.

Life and Friendship in Coliving

James Carrier defined friendship as a kind of relationship that is "based on spontaneous and unconstrained sentiment and affection", one that is free from the limits of geography, proximity, or pre-existing relationships such as kinship or trade (Carrier 1999, 21–2). My rela-

tionship with some residents, who later became key interlocutors, started with such spontaneity. My first chance encounter occurred on my second evening as I passed the communal garden where the residents were gathered around a big starfruit tree, the "village meeting place". When invited for a drink, I immediately accepted the glass of wine despite being a non-drinker. With hindsight, I am reminded of Meenakshi Nair Ambujam's reflection on the ethnographer's vulnerability and position when taking decisions or actions that you would not make in your normal personal life. Outside of the field situation, you would not just "talk to strangers, exchange numbers, or accept an invitation to walk with [them]", the kind of encounters which are "brimming with possibilities and potential" that help "build enduring bonds and relationships" in ethnographic research contexts (Ambujam 2021, 192).

However, it was not pure affection that established my relationship, but the homophily of friendship. As a resident of the coliving, coming from a largely similar demographic and socioeconomic background, I related to many of the residents' experiences. My initial interactions were more of a "contractual relationship, implicit or explicit, in which each party helps the other" (Titon 2008, 77). I shared knowledge about my research topic on coworking, coliving, and startup entrepreneurship, and they agreed to be interviewed as makers and users of these spaces.

While conducting the "coliving fieldwork", I was also doing "coworking fieldwork", which sometimes meant spending a large chunk of the day at coworking offices around the city. Back in the coliving, I conducted interviews with residents and staff members, its founders and investors to understand the facility's operations, daily life, and aspirations. I acted as the careful listener to every seemingly mundane story my informants were willing to share. I sat at different spots around the complex to observe their activities. I followed staff as they made up the rooms or organised the utility. Occasionally, I was invited to eat and join parties with the residents in the garden; yet most evenings, I took off my "researcher hat" to spend time with friends outside the complex, only to feel guilty about missing out on the happenings within.

For the first few weeks, no matter how much one-on-one or small group time I spent with the residents, I was not added to the group chat on messaging apps, nor did I receive more than a last-minute invitation to gatherings. I was an observer–participant orbiting around the edges of their universe. They only asked me for professional opinions about the lifestyle, the business model, and saw me as a "coliving expert" among them. Frustrated, I decided to invest more time, and subsequently, more of myself, into the coliving community. I began to work full days alongside the residents, many of whom had flexible jobs that allowed for remote working. I also invited my friends into the coliving instead of meeting them outside. By *being there* with full attention, I started developing a more personal relationship with the residents, which sometimes blurred the line between my roles; as Ambujam (2021, 191) knew, "[fieldwork] presents a liminal space where the personal and professional collapse."

The natural development of my relationship with residents helped us open up to one another. As a result, I gained much deeper insights into the coliving life through both my own experience and people's accounts. I let these relationships unfold naturally since "friendship as method demands that we research at the natural pace of friendship" (Tillman-Healy 2003, 734) and I wanted to understand how sociality was negotiated in the coliving space.

The following sections relay three events, or "key emotional episodes", that marked turning points in my progress. I let emotional connection and friendship with some of my key interlocutors play a significant role in my fieldwork; in addition to *being there* and *being with* them, I allowed myself to *feel for* and *feel with* them.

Key Emotional Episodes—Turning the Page

I depart from Peter Berger's concept of "Key Emotional Episodes" (KEE), which was defined as emotionally charged situations that "have a more radical impact on the persons involved". Such episodes "can exert essential influence on the field situation" – where "the side of 'observation' was at zero and the aspect of 'participation' at a maximum" (Berger 2010, 119–20). For Berger, these moments were surprising, unplanned, and out of control: the researcher was forced to succumb to the events and let their emotions and body (rather than conscious and rational decisions) take over. My experience was far less intense than Berger's KEEs;[3] however, I resonate with his apt descriptions. I only fully grasped the significance of these episodes after leaving the field, a general field experience whereby insights stand out only after researchers have left and the writing process starts, not in the moment caught up in daily life (Ingold 2014). The following sections describe how friendship as method and vulnerability retrospectively helped me make sense of these turning points. The first KEE happened around the end of my first extended stay in Modern Hamlet; the second occurred in between site visits; and the third happened in my last few weeks of coliving fieldwork.

KEE 1—"Going Native"[4]

During the last week of my first extended stay, we celebrated the Independence Day holiday over a long weekend. Some of the residents made plans to spend the weekend together in the coliving instead of returning to their family homes. I decided to invite everyone to my apartment for lunch. This was the first time I volunteered to host a gathering in my room; it symbolically opened the door for my interlocutors to learn more about my world.[5] The lunch turned into a board game night, then a few more nights of drinking, games, and long conversations. After two months, I had gradually turned from "a doctoral researcher that studies coliving space" into "a neighbour that lives in our 'village'." I was finally added to the group

[3] For example, see Berger's analysis of Renato Rosaldo's KEE in the aftermaths of his wife's death, with other important examples in anthropological literature.

[4] I use "going native" jokingly: for me, it did not entail learning the language or broader cultural practices because I was lucky enough to already come from the same socioeconomic demographics as the majority of people I researched.

[5] Some clarifications might be necessary here: while the name of the living arrangement model is "coliving", people live in self-containing studio / one-bedroom apartments, which are usually small and minimalist but with all necessities (except laundry). The coliving model focusses on building communally used spaces that are luxuries for urban dwellers, such as a garden, library, and meetup space.

chats and invited to gatherings much more frequently, acts that felt like official inclusion into the residents' community.[6] As mobile messaging apps can create or reinforce a sense of belonging and generate digital intimacy (Laan 2023), my membership in the Modern Hamlet residents' group chat allowed me to *be with* them collectively, virtually, while also *being there* in the physical spaces of the coliving facility.

After the holiday, I returned to Hà Nội to meet with my research team and our partner university. On the day of my departure, the residents and staff came to my apartment to say goodbye, helped carry my luggage, and spent time with me. The resident manager gave me a special departing gift, thanking me for the company, conversations, and insights. Nam (who we later took to the hospital) waited for me under the starfruit tree. A quick rendez-vous for a goodbye hug turned into an hour-long conversation. Nam told me about his experience moving into Modern Hamlet after ending an eight-year-long relationship. He also described leaving his parents' home as their queer, fourth-generation, first-born son, a title that would burden him with serious familial responsibilities. The serendipity of these last few hours left me in such an emotional state that tears started to roll down my cheeks as I sent my goodbye message in the group chat. I had just said goodbye to friends who had become an integral part of my life, not just people I conduct research on.

KEE 2—Choosing Friendship

Shortly before I moved back into Modern Hamlet for my second extended stay, a couple—both residents—went through a breakup. The event and subsequent revelations of wrongdoings (one party was accused of cheating with another person in the complex) created different factions. The open space design of the coliving meant awkward face-to-face interactions were imminent. The couple "co-parented" a cat and co-owned a business, which complicated the situation. When I had hung out with them, the cat was especially affectionate towards me, and Linh, his "mom", gave me the title of a godmother. Little Bao's particular fondness for me helped Linh and I grow closer. Therefore, when the breakup happened, I was naturally there to take care of her—not out of an obligation to a participant, but purely out of love for a friend who was hurt. I offered food, medicine, and a shoulder and pair of attentive ears. Our friendship and emotional connection consolidated through these difficult times, sometimes at an "accelerated speed of trust", as another resident noted.

Thanh, the ceremonial group leader, shared an insight that resonated with anthropological literature on friendship:

> *I think about residents in this community as "takers" and "givers". To be a part of this community of coliving residents, you cannot just take—and not just in the sense of money, but also time, effort and emotion—but you need to invest back a part of yourself. Those who would*

[6] Thanh, the resident who was the "admin" of the group chat, mentioned that every decision to add someone into a shared chat is political and carefully curated as it impacts the group dynamics if the residents do not get along well.

only like to take advantage of the community will be seen through and eventually excluded or will leave on their own.

The dissolution of Linh's romantic relationship bifurcated the core group of Modern Hamlet residents and, because of my proximity to Linh, I assigned myself to one of them. Even as I kept professional, diplomatic ties with the other side, I let my empathetic emotions for my friend take over my supposed objectivity. When friendship becomes a method of enquiry, and the network of relationships an object, researchers are exposed and vulnerable to intense emotions. They reveal and invest so much of themselves in the process, the research, and in the friendships they build (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 741). This created a writing challenge—my dual role as friend and researcher shapes "what to divulge, especially regarding information that potentially discredits our participants" (Tillmann-Healy 2003, 741).

The space sharing of coliving has the imminent possibility of conflict; I had to carefully consider the stories that I told between different "sides". The closer I was to someone, the trickier it was to decide: do I provide my friends with beneficial information, or do I stay and let conflicts run their course? When non-intervention prevailed, I felt like I betrayed my friends; yet, when I disclosed certain details as a friend, I wondered whether I was failing as a researcher by altering the trajectory.

KEE 3—The Vulnerable Researcher

The final KEE occurred in the last few weeks of my official fieldwork stay at Modern Hamlet. After Linh's breakup, the bond between the long-term residents' group I associated with strengthened, partly in support of her and partly due to organisational changes that allowed everyone to spend more time in the coliving. Every morning during this period, roundup calls would appear on the group chat, and I would take my laptop and sit at the meeting place. Every mealtime a request was put out to bring your own bowl to enjoy a homecooked meal or join a shared food order. After hours, I would have long conversations with my interlocutors over drinks, games, or music, co-constructing and "enriching the lives of others", as the coliving envisioned.

These daily acts of care were central to the residents' experience of Modern Hamlet, and my interlocutors invited me to participate. When I removed my "researcher hat" and became a friend, I found myself in invaluable conversations with the residents and staff. To reciprocate their kindness, I invited other residents into my life and took care of them as friends and neighbours due to the emotional bond we created as humans coinhabiting a shared space, not out of a researcher's duties. As Sandra Laugier has argued, we are ordinary human beings first and researchers/interlocutors second (Laugier 2016). It is this dependence and vulnerability as ordinary humans that we exercise our ethics of care to protect our interlocutors and nurture our friendships.

One afternoon, I came running home covered in tears with a broken heart, with a plan to bury myself in my room. However, I happened to cross paths with Nam and Linh, and they insisted on offering me shoulders, feeding me, and entertaining me so that I did not have to be alone. The rest of the group took turns visiting me and sleeping over to distract me until

I left. The service that the community offered each other, and by extension, offered me, helped me get through some of the lowest days in my fieldwork. In one of our later reunions, Nam shared that we might not have gotten so close if it had not been for my heartbreak, which placed me in a most vulnerable state. I trusted them to take care of me as I had taken care of them. "These shoulders are to *gánh* you all", Nam always joked, taking on the role of the emotional leader to carry the weight of emotional labour for the group (despite being physically carried by us to the hospital at one point!). As we voluntarily took turns to perform emotional labour, we formed a bond that was at least as strong as, if not more than, with my other longer-term friends. Embracing my experience of being a part of the community helped me understand why many had chosen to stay or return time and time again despite many reasons and opportunities to choose a different living arrangement.

Friendship as an ethnographic method required an immense amount of emotional labour. The residents and I were going through our twenties and thirties, some of the most monumental and defining years of our youth, together. Some moved to the city to pursue their career and escape the social and familial pressure on women to get married and have children early before being deemed "leftover". Others decided to build a new life after breakups and divorces. Some migrated to the city with a dream of changing the rural communities they came from. A few ran away from abusive and toxic relationships with their families who rejected their sexual identities. Everyone treated the connections they found in the coliving as part of a new chosen family on their healing journey. I offered emotional service as other residents sought my company through every major event: breakups, career struggles, or the death of family members. The situations that my interlocutors faced represented the negotiated process of Vietnamese middle-class worry, aspirations, and moralities in an age of anxiety and neoliberal policies (Tran 2023).

Reciprocal Vulnerability with Friendship as Method—Privilege and Power

The ethics of friendship (as method) mean that friendships require at least as much investment as the research project.[7] Opening up or expressing vulnerability is the only fair response to the stories our interlocutors tell us. However, I argue, it is the empathetic nature of friendship as method that allows researchers to embrace the key emotional episodes of *zero observation* and *maximum participation* (that is, *zero researcher* and *maximum friend*), productively reflecting on them to analyse the relationships built with and among our participants. My dual role of researcher and friend was helpful in building a connection with the residents of Modern Hamlet. "Going native" took it further. I embodied the immersed experience of the "community" and allowed myself to put aside my researcher role. I embraced being a human and fully stripped any defence or worry about acting professionally. I allowed myself to be taken care of, both in terms of everyday necessities and emotions.

However, this comes with caveats. As Carolyn Ellis (2004, 118) warns, being too emotionally involved with events and processes during fieldwork means that researchers will face mental and intellectual obstacles in the analysis process. I gained insights that I only realised

[7] For example, see Tillmann-Healy's discussion of Leigh Berger's research on Messianic Judaism (2003, 741).

later when I was distanced from the field and had time to reflect. While remaining critical of the underlying structures and issues around the coliving industry (which are beyond the scope of this article), I am more comfortable in mobilising support for the aspirations and vision of the coliving lifestyle. My emotional connection and display of vulnerability also set the foundation for my friendship with interlocutors as I empathised with them through their experiences of trauma, loss, and heartbreaks.

I also had the privilege of leaving the field in my role as a researcher. Friendship as method meant my friendships with the residents continued beyond the end of my physical stay, especially through digital technology-enabled "co-presence" (Chua 2021). However, I also recognise the power of being physically removed from the day-to-day at the coliving, and how writing about it advances my academic career. The boundaries of the field become blurred as I choose a different way of *being there* and *being with* my informants through daily chats, video calls and frequent check-ins. I reconstructed my engagement with my "field" from "co-location" to "co-presence" (Beaulieu 2010).

Shortly after I returned to Switzerland, the core group of residents and I started a project to develop a collection of multimodal outputs—books, podcasts, videos, and other multimedia—to promote the coliving model emerging in Viet Nam. While the project is currently on hold due to other life commitments, I see it as an opportunity to both "give back" and co-construct knowledge beyond academia. In response to the collaboration and solidarity that emerged from friendship as method, I have remained in constant dialogue with residents, shared publication drafts (including this article) and research summaries, and engaged with their suggestions to ensure I present a just account of events in my research outputs.

Conclusion

This article discussed my experience conducting ethnographic fieldwork in a coliving space, using the concepts of "friendship as method" and reciprocal vulnerability. It has been almost three decades since Ruth Behar (1996, 16) reaffirmed that "when you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably". Generations of anthropologists have since pushed for a form of ethnography that embraces the vulnerabilities researchers face in the field. Researching with vulnerability and friendship productively allowed me to open up, be emotionally vulnerable, feel with and feel for my interlocutors. Everyday care work and emotional labour was afforded reciprocally with my interlocutors beyond my role as a researcher. I could not have achieved this level of ethnographic intimacy if I had insisted on being a more objective observer. I demonstrated how "key emotional episodes" shaped anthropological research around emotional experiences and can act as a catalyst not only in advancing fieldwork friendships but also in illuminating hidden insights.

The emotions that render us vulnerable when we conduct fieldwork are not singular to anthropology. However, anthropology as a discipline, somewhat uniquely, allows researchers the opportunity to explore them. After all, anthropology is "the most humanistic of the sciences and the most scientific of the humanities" (Kroeber n. d., cited in Sluka and Robben 2012, 6). The lens of reciprocal vulnerabilities helps researchers relate to the communities they do research with on topics where the risks of physical and mental injuries are imminent

and foreseeable. However, it is also valuable in everyday and ordinary research projects that deal with relatively "benign" and "normal" topics. Acknowledging that the researcher is vulnerable—and, at the end of the day, a human—can open up avenues and trajectories for research to see beyond the surface. By fully embracing these experiences, especially the emotional aspects of field situations, researchers will be more empathetic to their research partners and translate those experiences into advocacy and solidarity with the researched communities.

I echo calls to include affective dimensions of fieldwork and aspects of friendship in methodological training, particularly for novice fieldworkers, even in projects where strong emotions are not expected (Stodulka, Dinkelaker, and Thajib 2019; Tillman-Healy 2003). This may bear the risk of rendering the researchers professionally vulnerable in an increasingly volatile and precarious academic environment. Nonetheless, doing carefully conducted anthropology from the heart brings a much more rewarding experience to the researcher, and rich, nuanced and meaningful insights to others. As Laura Thurmann (2020) reminds us, anthropology would be "a sad discipline if compassion, empathy and shared feelings of joy, trust and anger were not at the very heart of our methodology".

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THE SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE OF THE UNSPOKEN

Considering Physical Assault in Fieldwork

Pascale Bugnon

Abstract

This paper explores the silence of my traumatic experience, the feeling of vulnerability, and insecurity that affected my fieldwork and the writing process. Drawing on the concept of "auto-reflexivity", I address the "double violence", experienced in the field and institutionally, where the lack of support in my academic environment exacerbated existing trauma. I conclude with recommendations on how individuals, our discipline, and institutions can better prepare and care for researchers. It is crucial that anthropologists discuss and share their experiences by including them in anthropological literature and methodology courses.

Keywords: *physical assault, violence, unspoken experience, auto-reflexivity*

Introduction

My lip has tripled in size, my cheekbone hurts terribly, and I have trouble opening my right eye. I no longer recognize my face, distorted by the blisters and the purple colour of my skin. My fieldwork, which started just a few weeks ago, is turning into a nightmare. I feel a huge emptiness and ask myself a thousand questions. Should I continue? Why did this happen to me? Am I going back home? Why did this happen to me? What am I going to do? Why did this happen to me? Between the guilt, the questions, the difficulty in understanding what has just happened, I am literally lost. This personal turmoil will only be the prelude to further complications, for my personal situation has had a lasting impact on this research (and certainly the next) and especially on its writing. Indeed, not knowing how to deal with the violence I had suffered during my fieldwork, I was unable to redirect my research or renegotiate my position as an academic. Trapped in a position of "perfect student" or under control, I concealed this undeniable part of my field at the expense of a reflexive approach that would have allowed me to discuss my field, certainly differently.

This paper explores the silence of my traumatic experience, the feeling of vulnerability, and insecurity that affected my fieldwork and the writing process. My difficulty of putting into words, of verbalizing my academic research, led me to produce a tasteless and shallow piece of work, and I narrowly missed out on my diploma. This feeling of failure led me to start a new university course, which I experienced as a personal *tabula rasa*. By knowing that

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other people had experienced violence during their fieldwork, I began to lose my shame and was able to reflect on my past experiences. Drawing on the concept of "auto-reflexivity" (Heinze 2020), I will address the "double violence", experienced in the field and institutionally, where the lack of support in my academic environment exacerbated existing trauma (Kloß 2016). I conclude with recommendations on how individuals, our discipline, and institutions can better prepare and care for researchers.

A First Foray into Fieldwork

After months of preparation, I had finally begun my fieldwork. This dream fieldwork filled with adventure, encounters, and discoveries. With some difficulties maybe, but I was bullish. Enthusiastic and excited, I redoubled my energy, contacted many people and conducted many different interviews. In short, I was happy to do this research to complete my master's degree in ethnology. Of course, I felt a certain amount of stress: "Will I be able to get the data I need? How can I be sure I'm doing it right? Am I asking the 'right' questions? Will I meet the 'right' people?". But I had confidence. I was one of those hardworking students, not particularly bright, but full of good will. After three weeks in the capital, I went to a small town for a few days to interview a key person for my research. I was lucky enough to share her daily life with her family. But one morning she was busy with foreign clients, and I was left alone for a day. I took the opportunity to review my notes and work on my first data. In the late afternoon, I decided to go out and explore the surroundings of this small town of barely 10 000 inhabitants. It was the end of September, and the weather was grey and gloomy. A light rain was falling, casting a nostalgic veil over the small houses along the main road. Apart from a few passing cars, the streets were deserted and the atmosphere desolate. As I wandered aimlessly, I came across a young man sitting, killing time with a bottle of vodka. He was there, alone. He was mumbling some unintelligible words. I continued on my way, not paying any attention to him. A few moments later I felt a presence behind me. I turned and saw the same young man following me. I quickened my pace. I felt a shiver run down my spine and a knot in my stomach. I turned my head a second time and, without any understanding of what was happening, he punched me in the face. The shock was so strong that I collapsed. Before I could come to my senses, his heavy body was lying on top of mine, his hands were pulling at my clothes and his fists were beating me. I tried to scream, to ask for help, but his hand was over my mouth. I tried to get away, but it was impossible. I tried and tried again, but he was too strong. I remembered seeing cars pass by our two bodies lying on the asphalt and hoping that one of them would stop. But no, none of them stopped. My memories from then on are hazy... my ordeal ended when two women appeared out of nowhere and caused my attacker to flee. What are their names? Who are they? I don't know and I never will. But they saved me. One of them held me tightly and I started to cry on her breast. They took me out of the rain. Into a kitchen. Or a small café. My memories are blurred. They brought me hot tea and tried to comfort me. After a few minutes, I was able to articulate a few words. They asked me a few questions and I painfully explained that I was

from Switzerland, that I was a student. In the end, they said to me apologetically: "That happens a lot here...". The hot brew poured down my throat. The sobbing started again and all I wanted to do was go back, go home. I asked myself a thousand questions, doubts arose, I felt bad, and I was in pain. I went to my informant's home and got under my blankets. My face hurt more and more. In the small bathroom mirror I saw my swollen, distorted face. During dinner, my informant said the same words as my two rescuers: "It happens here, it's common". And she added: "You should always be wary of men who have been drinking". I should have known.

Then I decided to return to the capital. I didn't know what to do. I wanted to go back to my family cocoon. I needed to be pampered. But I couldn't bring myself to do it. I wanted to do this research. And I'm so ashamed. What have I done to get into this situation? I went through a period of self-blame and self-doubt about my ability to conduct ethnography. I was blocked. I wanted to go back, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. Going home early would have been a greater source of shame. So I stayed. I had two and a half months of fieldwork left and I tried to carry on. With ups and downs. I worked hard to stop thinking about what had happened, but sometimes, often, the trauma would resurface and condemn me to the same questions again. When it happened, I was stuck in my hotel room. The days went by and looked the same. I could no longer stand the dilapidated walls of my room. So I went out, but I felt fragile, I was afraid of everything, of everyone. I didn't dare talk to people. Pushed to my limits, I still managed to observe the festival I had come all this way for. But I had difficulties. I was weakened and so was my data. After weeks of doubt, uncertainty, and questions, I returned home. If my physical wounds had healed, the psychological ones had not. They were gaping and wouldn't close any time soon.

Silencing a Traumatic Experience

My return from my fieldwork did not relieve me. On the contrary. A second violence was waiting for me around the corner: the violence of the unspeakable. Of course I shared my experiences with my family and a few friends. But much remained unsaid. It was even more difficult with my supervisor. His harsh comments about my scraps of draft and the data I was trying to mobilize made me decide not to tell him what had happened. I felt I had no one to turn to. Moreover, I was afraid to talk about it and be labelled a "victim", a "failure", an "incapable", or any other term that would prove my inability to do "good fieldwork". This feeling took over and sealed my silence for years. And the trauma of what had happened haunted my personal relationship with the discipline, with the field, but most of all with writing. I struggled to put two words together. As soon as I sat down to write my master's thesis, the words got stuck and I couldn't return to the field intellectually. To immerse myself in those painful memories. The bruises were gone, but not the trauma. I found myself wanting to forget everything. I was unable to start analysing data or writing. Writing leads to restimulation: the beatings, the shame, the questions. As Amy Pollard points out, "Students reported finding it difficult to let go of the traumas of fieldwork, because the writing-up pro-

cess meant they were continually having to relive them" (2009). For weeks, months, and finally years I could not write this text. These few pages. And the more time that passed without me being able to write it, the more my frustration, anxiety, and guilt grew. I was suffering and failing as an anthropologist. This reinforced a further sense of shame and regret that I wasn't good enough, that I wasn't cut out for fieldwork.

Fieldwork. The obligatory requirement for any established or aspiring anthropologist is often fetichized through a tale of adventure. During my undergraduate years, I had pre-fieldwork courses in which I heard several stories about academics' "little failures" and how they had brilliantly overcome them to produce dazzling pieces of work. Why couldn't I do the same? Why couldn't I put two sentences together without suffering? These stories, as interesting as they are, accentuated my silence around my very personal experience of fieldwork. I then saw my vulnerability as detrimental (Henize 2020). And I had no one to turn to, certainly not in the academic world in which I was immersed. As Sundberg (2003, 188) notes, the peculiar silence implies academia "fails to provide adequate guidance for students preparing for research, leading many to individualise and thus conceal the challenges they encounter". This situation "reproduces violence as it further depoliticises structural violence by obscuring power relations" (Cai 2019).

"I'm not the only one"

If writing hasn't been a cure, the path to healing developed in the most unexpected ways. First, I decided to start a new university course. Like an academic *tabula rasa*. It was like a rebirth, starting from scratch, without this painful experience, without this ball and chain that hindered my movements. By starting again, I gave myself the right to try again. My sense of failure was not an academic death sentence. Second, I was completely relieved to learn that my own experience was not an isolated, unpredictable case of bad luck. Far from it. While talking to a colleague, he told me about an incident that had happened to his supervisor: this renowned professor had been beaten up during his last fieldwork and was on sick leave. This news had an incredible effect on me. What? An experienced anthropologist, whose reputation was well established, had been physically attacked on his own fieldwork? In an area he had studied for years... of which he knew the workings, the intricacies? I was no longer in a unique situation. Others had experienced what I had. I did not talk to this professor about my own experience, because I was still too ashamed. But I began to read. And read. And read everything I could about violence in anthropology. These readings troubled me, shocked me, disturbed me, but they were necessary. They helped me move from what I thought was unique to something sadly common. Progressively, I found the strength to write my master's thesis. I had to close this circle. But the result was frustrating. Almost disgusting. No trace of my traumatic experience: the beatings were gone. My vulnerability was gone. The feelings of shame and failure were gone. I silenced my experience because I wanted to produce a "good" ethnography. I was not able or did not know how to rethink my positionality. Much less to renegotiate my research. And I missed my point...

A Cared Academia

The years have passed. This experience doesn't define me but it is part of me. Like Larissa Begley writes, "as anthropologists, we are part of the narrative we create. Our fieldwork does not exist detached from our own emotions and our lives. We impact on those we study and they impact on us. It it because of this dialectical relationship we have with the 'field' that we must recognize the impact that fieldwork can have emotionally, psychologically and physically on us" (2009, 9–10). Instead of imposing myself silence, I should have spoken: "rather than understanding our vulnerabilities as a failure and lack of professionalism and political engagement, we need to ask how we can produce ethnography through engaged research in violent contexts from which we cannot be completely detached" (Schild 2021). Indeed, these experiences, however disturbing they may be, must be included in the analysis of the data obtained, and it is necessary to reflect on them in ethnographic writing and knowledge production (Kloß 2017, 396). As Heinze argues, an "auto-reflexive" approach is then required that allows researchers to discuss and reflect on how we are affected by fieldwork: "When spaces are created for researchers to not just state their subjectivity but also to divulge how the research has impacted them, their traumas are no longer exiled to being 'dirty little secrets' or pieces in exclusively feminist journals. Rather they are allowed to become part of the collective understanding of some of the harsher realities of knowledge production" (2020). Thereby, it is crucial that anthropologists discuss and share their experiences by including them in anthropological literature and methodology courses. Preparing students for the widest range of experiences in the field will provide them with more useful and practical tools for dealing with fieldwork (Begley 2009; Kloß 2017, 411). Of course, no course or seminar could have prevented or prepared me for what happened. And even less could the few pieces of advice given in a methodology course. But the lack of training on the prevalence of violence in fieldwork perpetuates the larger doubt that it is actually a problem (Cai 2019; Heinze 2020). Various forms of violence exist while conducting fieldwork. My experience, and many others, should not be dismissed as an isolated incident. We should be talking about this reality. "Only when catastrophes are accepted as possible outcomes of any research endeavour can the complicity in their silencing be broken and ways of using them as data be established" (Schneider 2020, 189). I now know that I am not alone, and this is an important part of my self-care.

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TÉMOIGNAGES DE VIOLENCES PENDANT LA RECHERCHE ETHNOGRAPHIQUE

Regard sur le traumatisme vicariant et la fatigue compassionnelle

Amanda Jousset

Résumé

Cet article questionne la gestion des effets des témoignages de violences sur les chercheur·euse·s en anthropologie. Bien que travaillant dans le cadre d'interactions avec des êtres humains, les anthropologues discutent très peu des conséquences que peuvent provoquer ces rencontres sur leur équilibre mental. Des concepts, tels que le traumatisme vicariant et la fatigue compassionnelle, développés dans la littérature sur le milieu médical et le travail social permettent toutefois de saisir les conséquences de l'exposition aux récits difficiles. En se basant sur ses notes de recherche sur la culture du cacao au Pérou, l'autrice croise son vécu avec celui d'autres chercheur·euse·s. Cet article propose de considérer ces effets déstabilisants de la recherche empirique comme faisant partie intégrante du processus de recherche, quel que soit le thème abordé par la recherche, tout en remettant le bien-être des chercheur·euse·s au centre de la méthodologie.

Mots-clés : *traumatisme vicariant*, *fatigue compassionnelle*, *violence*, *cacao*, *filières*, *produit agricole tropical*

TESTIMONIES OF VIOLENCE DURING ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH. A LOOK AT VICARIOUS TRAUMA AND COMPASSION FATIGUE

Abstract

This article looks at how anthropologists deal with the effects of witnessing violence. Although anthropologists work in interaction with human beings, they rarely discuss the consequences of these encounters on their mental equilibrium. However, concepts such as vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue, developed in medical and social work literature, do provide some insight into the consequences of exposure to difficult narratives. Based on the author's research notes on cocoa cultivation in Peru, this article interweaves her experience with that of other researchers. This article proposes to consider these destabilizing effects of empirical research as an integral part of the research process, whatever the topic of the research, and thereby put the well-being of researchers at the heart of the methodology.

Keywords: *vicarious trauma*, *compassion fatigue*, *violence*, *cocoa*, *supply chains*, *tropical agricultural product.*

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Rencontrer les traces de la violence

De 2018 à 2021, dans le département de San Martín au Pérou, j'ai mené une enquête ethnographique sur la production de cacao cultivé aux abords d'aires protégées. Cette recherche semble aborder les relations à la nature d'un point de vue simplement technique. Toutefois, la rencontre avec divers témoignages de formes de violences tant structurelles – liées à la filière du cacao – que physiques, telles que des conflits armés, m'a profondément affectée dans ma capacité à analyser les données, bien que je n'aie pas vécu ces violences personnellement. Près de deux ans après les expériences de recherche décrites ici[1], je questionne la gestion des effets des récits témoignant plusieurs formes de violences sur l'équilibre des chercheur·euse·s en anthropologie.

Transition

Le cacao a été implanté dans le département de San Martín entre la fin des années 1990 et le début des années 2000, dans le cadre du projet *Programa Desarollo Alternativo* (Programme de Développement Alternatif). L'un des objectifs importants de cette introduction était de proposer le cacao comme solution alternative à la culture de la coca pour les populations rurales de ce département, car le département de San Martín est aussi un important producteur de feuilles de coca. L'implémentation du cacao a un rôle tant politique qu'économique, car les filières de la coca auraient servi de soutien financier à des groupes armés politiques dissidents basés dans la région dans les années 1980-1990, tels que le *Sendero Luminoso* (Sentier Lumineux) et le MRTA (*Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru*, Mouvement Révolutionnaire Tupac Amaru). Ces deux groupes armés marxistes disaient revendiquer une réduction des inégalités vécues par les populations rurales. Le groupe armé *Sendero Luminoso* est d'abord un parti politique créé à partir d'une fraction du Parti Communiste Péruvien en 1970 à Ayacucho. Il tente alors de répondre aux Réformes Agraires du gouvernement militaire de Juan Velasco Alvarado, d'abord par des actions pacifiques. En mai 1980, le *Sendero Luminoso* initie des attaques contre des centres stratégiques, tels que des postes de police. Celles-ci s'amplifient en conflit armé interne avec le gouvernement péruvien. En 1982, le MRTA est créé et s'insère dans ces affrontements armés avec des revendications similaires. Ce conflit, qui durera jusqu'en 2000, fera de nombreuses victimes collatérales: la *Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación del Perú* (Commission de la Vérité et de la Réconciliation du Pérou) reconnaîtra que la mort de plus de 69 000 personnes a été provoquée tant au niveau de ces groupes armés, que de l'armée péruvienne et de la société civile par le *Sendero Luminoso*, le MRTA et l'armée péruvienne.

Dès le début de mes recherches, j'ai été marquée émotionnellement par des formes de violence liées à la fois à cette histoire contemporaine de San Martín et à la fois au marché du

[1] Le terme «expérience de recherche» est utilisé pour indiquer que, contrairement à ce que souligne le concept de «terrain», le processus de recherche n'est pas lié à un lieu spécifique ou à un temps fixe, mais à une multitude d'interactions qui dépassent les dimensions temporelles et géograhiques de l'enquête (D'Amico-Samuels 1997).

cacao. Comme le cacao est un produit agricole tropical, son histoire, ses filières et ses financements recoupent ceux d'autres filières agricoles tropicales, comme le sucre, le café et le caoutchouc. Ces filières sont caractérisées par un prix payé aux cultivateur·rice·s étant très bas en comparaison avec le prix final de consommation. Cela signifie qu'il y a une forte différence entre les revenus des cultivateur·rice·s de cacao et ceux des différents acteurs des filières et de l'industrie du chocolat, souvent basés dans les pays importateurs en Europe occidentale et Amérique du Nord.

Saveur amère

Ma recherche se concentre sur les filières durables qui tentent de réduire ces inégalités, notamment en valorisant tant la biodiversité que la stabilité des revenus des cultivateur·rice·s. Toutefois, même dans ces filières durables du cacao, ces inégalités de revenus persistent. De plus, elles se retrouvent aussi dans les financements de projets de développement agraires et de projets de recherche sur le cacao qui se concentrent autour des filières durables. Ces projets sont souvent financés et coordonnés par des partenariats publics-privés entre les pays importateurs et les entreprises chocolatières. Or, une part importante de ces fonds se concentre autour de la gestion de projet et du financement de personnes diplômées venant des pays importateurs, les cultivateur·rice·s n'étant que très peu souvent financé·e·s. Tant les cultivateur·rice·s que les agronomes et chercheur·euse·s expriment leur réaction face à ces inégalités sous forme de frustration, de ressentiment – « dégoût » – et d'interrogations sur « qui gagne » dans la filière du cacao (Entretien avec la chercheuse Juliette[2], en ligne, 2023 ; et avec l'ingénieur agronome Ronald[3], Tarapoto, 2021).

De manière similaire, lorsque je comprends que sur des centaines de milliers de francs suisses investis dans des recherches sur le cacao, la plupart des fonds est investie dans la coordination des projets, puis la recherche, et que souvent rien n'arrive jusqu'aux cultivateur·rice·s, qui travaillent souvent gratuitement contre le droit de participer à ces projets sélectifs, j'écris être « dégoûtée », avoir du « mal à avaler la pilule ». Entrant en écho avec mes interlocuteur·rice·s, je décris dans mes notes la filière du cacao comme « un peu sale, désespérément amère » (Jousset 2021).

Ce malaise se retrouve plus tard lors du processus d'analyse, dans un brouillon d'écriture : « personne ne m'avait avertie qu'étudier un produit agricole tropical serait difficile, simplement parce que sa production et son marché sont si profondément inscrits dans des stratégies et des rencontres coloniales et postcoloniales » (Jousset 2023). En effet, les filières durables du cacao semblent au premier abord valoriser une relation positive à la nature, relation qui est souvent perçue de manière romantique : elle ne peut être que saine et revigorante, ainsi que supportant des vies plus dignes. Par ailleurs, le cacao et le chocolat en général sont entourés

[2] Nom d'emprunt.
[3] Nom d'emprunt.

de visions exotiques, voire érotiques[4] ou spirituelles[5]. Ces images positives du cacao s'inscrivent dans la continuité des stratégies de marketing des filières du cacao du XVIII^e^ et XIX^e^ siècle qui promouvaient une image idyllique et calme des plantations, alors qu'elles étaient cultivées par des personnes en esclavage (Hackenesch 2017).

Ces images positives du cacao sont renforcées par la mystification de l'Amazonie en général, que ce soit par sa flore et faune diversifiées que par ses populations perçues comme accueillantes. Par exemple, un employé d'un projet de développement souligne que «la première fois qu'[il est] arrivé ici, c'était comme arriver en Amazonie : le mythe». (Entretien avec Victor[6], Juanjui, 2021). De plus, les particularités gastronomiques, culturelles et environnementales du département de San Martín sont promues au Pérou pour en faire une région touristique attrayante, notamment par l'appellation *Región Verde* (Région Verte). Cette fierté régionale se retrouve dans les discours de plusieurs habitant·e·s de San Martín interviewé·e·s.

Les imaginaires positifs autour du cacao, de l'Amazonie et du département de San Martín laissent peu transparaître les discriminations vécues par les cultivateur·rice·s de cacao. Cela m'a demandé du temps avant de pouvoir énoncer que «le cacao était rude» (Jousset 2023). En effet, j'étais prise par la passion du monde du chocolat dont les discours réifient facilement la quête de nouvelles saveurs et les bonnes pratiques agricoles pour une culture durable. Relever la rudesse des filières du cacao, c'est accepter qu'en tant que chercheuse basée en Suisse, j'étais à la fois portée par certains privilèges économiques et sociaux et à la fois prise par la pression de produire des résultats et conduire une recherche efficace ; j'étais également enrobée par la passion du chocolat ainsi qu'ébranlée émotionnellement par l'amertume de ses inégalités.

Les effets performatifs de la violence

Les inégalités de revenus dans les filières de cacao poussent celui-ci à être implanté dans des zones dans lesquelles un prix bas des fèves de cacao puisse être imposé aux cultivateur·rice·s, telles que des zones rurales isolées des centres économiques, comme c'est le cas dans le département de San Martín. Divers témoignages attestent de la précarité extrême vécue par la population rurale pendant les années de transition dans les années 1990, entre la destruction des plantations de coca et le début des plantations de cacao, car des cultures vivrières avaient été éradiquées par des actions de la DEA (*Drug Enforcement Administration*, Agence Américaine Anti-drogue) des États-Unis et de la DEVIDA (*Comisión Nacional para el Desarollo y Vida sin Drogas*, Commission nationale pour le développement et une vie sans drogue) du Pérou en même temps que les plantations de coca.

Lors d'un entretien, Rosa relate des souvenirs du début des années 1990 alors que la région était encore prise dans des conflits armés. Elle décrit la culture de la coca comme rentable,

[4] Des imaginaires érotiques sont liés aux images utilisées dans les publicités (Hackenesch 2017), mais aussi au plaisir de la consommation, d'offrir et de réconforter, ainsi qu'aux effets stimulants de la théobromine, un de ses composés.

[5] Depuis quelques années, émergent des cérémonies collectives durant lesquelles est consommé du cacao pur.

[6] Nom d'emprunt.

mais «endemoniada» (démoniaque) et utilise le terme «terror» (terreur) pour décrire ses impressions des actions armées tant des groupes politiques dissidents que de l'Etat péruvien. Elle souligne que la culture de la coca se faisait en cachette, souvent pendant la nuit. Elle ajoute que des corps étaient retrouvés dans la rivière, parfois démembrés (Entretien avec Rosa[7], Juanjui, 2021).

Ces témoignages sont toutefois à situer dans un contexte contemporain : les souvenirs difficiles de la coca sont facilement racontés comme une époque révolue et douloureuse pour valoriser le cacao qui a été implanté comme une alternative légale à la coca, notamment lorsque l'interlocuteur·rice a un lien avec le cacao et vient d'un pays importateur de cacao.

Même si ces histoires semblent faire partie de l'époque révolue du contexte politique particulier des années 1990, elles ont apporté un éclairage important sur le vécu et les valeurs des personnes qui ont partagé ces témoignages. Comprenant cette importance, j'ai fourni un effort particulier pour saisir les effets de ces actes de violence sur les manières de cultiver le cacao.

Cette violence ne fait pas seulement partie du passé et le cacao n'a pas été en mesure de l'effacer.De plus, des attaques à main armée ont aussi eu lieu en même temps que mon séjour dans cette région. La description ethnographique suivante se passe chez Maria[8], qui accueille les membres des coopératives et des chercheur·euse·s lors de leurs visites pour contrôler ou étudier la production de cacao :

> *Tout le monde se regroupe sur la terrasse de María : un homme de la* ronda *(organisation dedéfense locale) du village voisin arrive avec des informations sur les identités des jeunes qui ont réalisé le vol à main armée de la semaine dernière – j'étais absente pendant cet événement. Tout le monde l'écoute, commente, rajoute des informations sur son propre vécu. C'est un moment important pour donner sens à un événement violent qui ne s'était pas produit depuis plusieurs années. Des questionnements surgissent quant à la sécurité générale : est-ce que le commerce florissant du cacao et les liens avec des investissements étrangers peuvent attirer d'autres attaques comme celles-ci ?*

La gestion des impacts de la violence ne se fait pas de manière individuelle, mais bien collective. L'inquiétude que de tels actes puissent se répéter montre que la violence circule en «transmet[tant] clairement son message à la grande majorité des gens qui ne sont pas physiquement affectés par elle» (Schröder et Schmidt 2001, 6, ma traduction). Si «l'anthropologie est de plus en plus impliquée dans des zones de traumas potentiels» (Carter 2017, 42, ma traduction), et que la méthodologie de l'ethnographie repose sur la création de moments d'écoute active, de confiance et parfois d'intimité, comment reconnaître la transmission et les impacts de la violence sur la sensibilité émotionnelle des chercheur·euse·s ?

[7] Nom d'emprunt.
[8] Nom d'emprunt.

Dialogues

Ces impacts de la transmission de la violence sur l'équilibre des chercheurs·euse·s restent peu questionnés lors d'une recherche ethnographique. En cherchant les traces de récits d'expériences de recherche difficiles, j'ai rencontré deux concepts développés en littératures médicale et du travail social, qui permettent de reconnaître qu'écouter et assister des personnes ayant vécu des situations difficiles peut provoquer un second traumatisme – le traumatisme vicariant – et une fatigue proche de l'épuisement professionnel – la fatigue compassionnelle (Hernandez-Wolfe *et al.* 2015 ; Bouvier et Dellucci 2017). Sans vouloir établir un diagnostic médical, je propose de tisser certaines parallèles entre, d'une part, les questionnements et les solutions discutés autour de ces concepts et, d'autre part, les états déstabilisants qui peuvent être provoqués lors d'une recherche ethnographique.

J'ai lu pour la première fois le terme « traumatisme vicariant » sur le blog BADASSES (Anonyme 2022) qui propose un espace anonyme pour des témoignages d'expériences difficiles vécues pendant la recherche. Dans un bref témoignage anonyme, l'auteur·rice associe à ce concept l'état de confusion provoqué par des témoignages de violence lors d'un entretien : iel n'arrive plus à écouter et est envahi·e d'images.

Cette expérience fait écho à la mienne. Mes émotions deviennent particulièrement fortes lors de relecture de notes de recherche ou de littérature sur le contexte historique et actuel du cacao. Dans une note, j'écris : « Si je ferme les yeux je vois ces corps que je n'ai jamais vu. [...] Je vois ces armes dans la nuit, ces combats dans les bois » (Jousset 2022). Cela fait écho à la description des « symptômes intrusifs tels que des *flashbacks* » du traumatisme vicariant décrits par Bouvier et Delluci (2017).

En relatant une expérience similaire, Tankink (2007) souligne qu'elle a réussi à mettre en place des stratégies pour mitiger les effets de récits traumatiques durant un entretien, mais réécouter l'entretien sans la présence de l'interlocutrice a été plus difficile. De manière comparable, revenir sur mes notes reste encore douloureux. En les relisant, je retombe régulièrement sur des termes tels que « rage » et « dégoût ». Mes premiers brouillons d'écriture évoquent des notes que j'aimerais laisser dans l'oubli, des souvenirs « nauséabonds » ou « qui sont un nœud qui me donne la nausée » (Jousset 2021).

Que ce soit lors d'entretiens prolongés, d'observation participante ou d'interactions banales et informelles, l'avancée de la recherche dépend souvent des relations de confiance que l'ethnologue peut établir avec les autres personnes qui participent à sa recherche. Ce processus peut mener à partager des moments affectifs qui permettent le témoignage d'actes violents qui n'auraient probablement pas été nommés dans des situations d'entretien plus formelles.

L'apparition potentielle de relations proches et de confiance, accentuée par la volonté de comprendre le point de vue des personnes participant à la recherche, peut renforcer l'exposition aux témoignages de violence et donc l'apparition de traumatisme vicariant ou de fatigue compassionnelle (Hernandez-Wolfe *et al.* 2015). Ainsi, même lors de recherches ne se focalisant pas explicitement sur la violence, telles que des recherches sur les savoir-faire agricoles, les anthropologues peuvent être exposé·e·s à des témoignages de violence. Si ces récits ne faisaient pas partie du processus d'enquête et si je n'avais pas investi autant d'effort

pour valoriser l'empathie comme moyen de compréhension des vécus des personnes qui sont liées au cacao, la violence inscrite dans les témoignages de conflits armés à San Martín, dans l'histoire du cacao et dans la discrimination économique sur lesquelles se basent les filières du cacao ne m'aurait probablement pas affectée avec la même intensité.

Scandaliser le quotidien

Pour donner du sens aux expériences de recherche complexes, je sentais que je devais d'abord passer par un processus de guérison d'une partie de moi qui avait été abîmée lors des étapes de la recherche. Néanmoins, ce n'est pas par les étapes généralement explicitées de la recherche ethnographique que j'ai réalisé ce parcours de guérison, mais bien par le partage dans des espaces informels, ainsi que par des pratiques d'écriture moins conventionnelles, telles que l'écriture automatique, la poésie ou la fiction. Ces recherches d'écritures alternatives reflètent aussi la nécessité d'éviter de rendre la violence exotique, particulièrement lorsqu'elle advient dans un lieu distant des personnes qui lisent et écoutent les analyses – ce qui est le cas lorsque je présente ma recherche en Suisse. Parmi mes notes de recherche, j'inscris qu'« écrire pour l'Université, c'est faire scandale du quotidien » (Jousset 2021). En général, je sens que cette exposition à la violence quotidienne fait partie de ma recherche, mais d'un autre côté comment en parler sans l'exotiser ? Une solution serait d'appréhender, comme à travers cet article, les impacts difficilement palpables de cette violence sur la recherche elle-même, afin de montrer que les anthropologues font aussi partie du monde qu'iels étudient.

Parler de ses propres vulnérabilités dans l'espace universitaire et selon le format académique reste limité, car une intervention publique – orale ou écrite – demande, de manière contradictoire, de s'exposer personnellement et d'héroïser sa douleur et ses difficultés afin qu'elles soient légitimes publiquement. Les formes de restitutions académiques, en offrant peu d'espaces pour aborder les vulnérabilités, participent à invisibiliser les effets performatifs de la violence en valorisant l'exposition de résultats convaincants et en rendant silencieux les échecs et les souffrances.

En discutant de l'exposition et de la gestion des effets performatifs de la violence structurelle et physique, j'espère avoir montré que les anthropologues ne sont pas « immunisés·e·s contre les conflits et les dynamiques de pouvoir » (Hanson et Richards 2019, 109, ma traduction) qui traversent les communautés qui participent à la recherche. Accepter les dimensions affectives des méthodologies de la recherche ethnographique pourrait permettre de mettre en place des stratégies pour faire face aux multiples formes de violences qui occupent le quotidien et donc la recherche.

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Autrice

Amanda Jousset passe par le biais de l'ethnographie pour révéler la richesse des émotions, sensations et engagements politiques qui permettent la transmission des techniques au sein de la relation entre les êtres humains et l'environnement. Réalisant une thèse à l'Institut d'Ethnologie à Neuchâtel, elle se centre sur les relations affectives à la terre dans le cadre de la culture du cacao aux abords des aires protégées à San Martín au Pérou. Cette thèse s'inscrit dans la continuité de ses travaux durant le Master (plantes médicinales et sauvage en Suisse ; gestion des déchets dans un écovillage en France ; élaboration d'une maison temporaire en R.D.P. Lao) et de ses expériences pratiques dans l'agriculture biologique en Europe occidentale, Canada, Asie et Amérique Latine.
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and the environment. Completing her thesis at the Institute of Anthropology of Neuchâtel, she focuses on affective relationships with the earth in the context of cocoa cultivation on the next to protected areas in San Martín, Peru. This thesis is a continuation of her work during her Master's degree (medicinal and wild plants in Switzerland; waste management in an ecovillage in France; building of a temporary house in Lao P.D.R.) and her practical experience in organic farming in Western Europe, Canada, Asia, and Latin America.

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UNVEILING VULNERABILITY

Positionality and Affective Territories in Psychiatry and Academia

Paola Juan

Abstract

This article explores the process of "unveiling" researcher positionality during fieldwork in Swiss psychiatric spaces and in academia, whilst the researcher herself has a personal connection to the topic as a family member of someone with long-term psychological difficulties. I argue that vulnerability generates what I call "affective territories". These are decisive in producing forms of knowledge that would otherwise escape researchers in fields where epistemic injustice is systemic. It shows how this positionality can become central in entering spaces of care and solidarity. But this unveiling also generated personal doubts concerning scholarly credibility. This paper tackles why, arguing that many academic circles still equate such credibility with keeping an "objective" distance and remaining emotionally non-vulnerable. It highlights a paradox in anthropology: while reflexive inquiries into the affective and political entanglements within social suffering are epistemologically valued, academic cultures do not always provide supportive spaces for such positionings and methodologies.

Keywords: *vulnerability, positionality, affect, mental health, care, academia*

Introduction

In the spring semester of 2023, whilst researching at a university abroad, I went to a prominent anthropologist's office to get advice on my project in Swiss psychiatric institutions. I admired her scholarship for the insightful writing and degree of reflexivity in dealing with and researching painful topics taking place in the region she came from. I talked to her about one particular concern: the fact that I, too, had a personal and sensitive link to my research topic. My sister was first hospitalized in a psychiatric ward more than ten years ago. Witnessing this, and what unfolded afterward left a deep mark that I only later untangled. This professor encouraged me to go down the path of disclosing this information in my research: "Exploring this has more value than treating it distantly. My own focus, and the work I find interesting, is that which creates knowledge through affective, intimate relationships." After telling her that this was challenging because of academic and personal barriers, that shall be further explained in this article, she went on to describe how her supervisor, a very well-known anthropologist, told her during her PhD journey that her own research was "academic suicide" because her project, which grappled with the cultural, political, and affective entanglements of certain kinds of abuse, was too close to her

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own life experience. She decided to carry on her project anyway, against the advice of her thesis committee.

This article explores the challenges of doing ethnography within Swiss psychiatric spaces, where the author's sister has had significant long-term psychological disorders, and where the project is driven by the strong affective entanglements present in the author's personal life, which generate emotions such as anger, guilt, and a need to understand the complexities of the situation. This positionality was a condition of the research, on an epistemic and practical level. My interest in this field, the emotions and relationships I developed there, and my ethnographic data are all influenced and shaped by personal familial experiences. Positionality became key in understanding the field.

Yet within academia, I found myself unable to express freely the impact of my familial story on my research interest, methods, and process. The "unveiling" of my relationship to psychological vulnerability and positionality became a necessary act which also incurred a personal cost. This was partly due to the emotions generated by stigma surrounding mental health and the situation itself, and partly due to the lack of supportive spaces for the vocalization of such positioning in academic cultures. Despite the fact that it is common for anthropologists to tackle difficult subjects and undertake research in fields experiencing much human suffering, it can make us vulnerable in a whole new way within academia when we talk about and conduct research on forms of suffering which have affected us. Ethnography generates situated, relational, and embodied knowledge. Theory and ethnography have a symbiotic, dialectical relationship; a "creative tension" (Biehl 2013). They are interrelated, mutually reinforcing. The ethnographer's theorizing is always dialogical, the result of a complex combination of what is owed to interlocutors in the field, to their lived experiences and perceptions.

Through reflexive inquiry, the first part of this article explores how our positionality can foster a deep and nuanced understanding of people's struggles and subjectivities within complex and painful entanglements. This positionality, in all its vulnerability, is anchored in what I call "affective territories". These places of affect and vulnerability territorialize and generate epistemologies in the relational encounters framed by one's positionality. The constitution of affective territories is analysed here through two specific lenses and constitutive forces that are anger and guilt. With the notion of "affective territory", I argue that vulnerable positionings generate forms of knowledge that could otherwise escape researchers in affectively complex fields where "epistemic injustice" (Fricker 2007) is systemic. The unveiling of this positionality is also key in finding a voice to narrate ethnography, as analytic and narrative categories are contiguous and interdependent (Narayan 2012). The second part of the article illustrates how this positionality enters, and becomes central, in these affective territories, or spaces of care and solidarity, such as the karaoke of the psychiatric hospital and psychoeducation programmes for families.

The third and last part of this article explores such issues in the process of unveiling my positionality and relationship to psychological vulnerability. I scrutinize both my experience as a PhD candidate within academia and as a researcher within psychiatric spaces. I argue that many academic circles still equate scholarly credibility with keeping an "objective" distance and remaining emotionally non-vulnerable, even when the boundaries between public and private domains in ethnographic research become blurred.

Positionality and Affective Territories in Psychiatric Spaces

Unveiling one's relation to psychological vulnerability was one of the first discussion subjects that came up during an interview with leaders of an association for family members of people with schizophrenia and related diagnoses. As they explained their own personal stories, they all described fears around talking about it. "Especially not to my nurse friends!"[1], said one of the members of the association who was herself a nurse. They expressed shame, embarrassment, guilt, fear of rejection, stigma, and of being labelled the cause of it. They also expressed anger towards themselves, their relatives, and towards the psychiatric services. Family members often present symptoms of depression due to the weight and complexity of their situation at home and from the state of distress displayed by their loved ones, according to psychoeducation programmes' facilitators. As we shall see later in this article, they arrived at the conclusion that the support system they developed among themselves within this association helped them deal with these shared emotions, find openness, and unveil their individual complex situations within their own social milieus. These stories resonated with me, as I had experienced similar feelings of discouragement and struggled to talk about them.

Positionality in anthropology usually refers to sociological characteristics: age, gender, class, race, disability, cast, among others. Such factors are indeed important in my field, but another element is essential here: one's relationship to psychological vulnerability, which in my case starts with my sister's life path.[2] She suffered a psychotic break that led to temporary hospitalization in a psychiatric ward just over ten years ago, towards the beginning of her twenties. This event marked the start of a new life, in which taking care of herself took more energy, and in which work and productivity were backgrounded. When I asked her how she would want her situation to be described in this paper, she said the following: "I am now in a process of reconstruction, or remission, with a lot of family support. My daily activities focus on well-being, such as nature walks, and I still need medication and psychotherapy." My sister's condition impacted not only on my life and that of my family, but also my research path, approach, and interests. The latter is partly the result of the love I have for the person I grew up with, and of my indignation surrounding the political and societal methods of dealing with her experiences.[3]

It is said, in psychiatry, that there is such a thing as "experiential knowledge" – as opposed to psychiatric expertise. One could argue that this form of knowledge depends on one's positionality; it is embodied, phenomenological, or even ontological. Narayan (2012) highlights that knowledge is always generated from a particular location within a given society; it is impossible to be omniscient in society, even as an insider. The situational character of this knowledge finds new dimensions in the psychiatric field, due to the highly diverse forms of suffering and distinctive phenomenological and affective states encountered.

My fieldwork was realized between 2019 and 2024 in psychiatric services, communities, and non-profit organizations that gravitate around a psychiatric hospital promoting

[1] All field citations, originally in French, have been translated by the author.

[2] My sister gave her written consent to all the information reported about her in this paper.

[3] See Pauline Blum (2024) for a sociological analysis of how the emergence of a psychological disorder in a person has the effect of reshaping their siblings' life trajectories.

a "humanistic" philosophy of care, in a rural region of Switzerland. Psychiatry has proved to be a contested, sometimes stigmatized and potentially contradictory world. It constitutes a complex field precisely because of manifold positional, political, and affective entanglements. I came to understand such entanglements and positionings within the psychiatric field as *affective territories*. This notion refers to the crystallization of polarized collective emotions and affects through similar positionings within psychiatric spaces. I draw here on Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of territoriality (1972; 1980), as a notion that highlights the close relations between our subjectivities, and the political, economic, institutional, affective, and spatial environments we are immersed in, and shows how our subjectivities and positionings are anchored within these elements. This concept also invokes the study of complex articulations between affect, power, subjectivity, and emotion proposed by scholars interested in affects (Ahmed 2004a; 2004b; Anderson 2014; Brennan 2004; Connolly 2002; Massumi 2015; Thrift 2008, among many others). Research looking into affect opens up new ground, showing how we are affectively constituted by others, and how these affective connections are political activities (Brennan 2004), that depend on positionalities within affective networks and territories. Following Baruch Spinoza, the "affective turn" approaches affect as something different from emotions. It moves beyond a focus on personal emotional experiences to explore our ability to share affects in more depth. Affects cannot be considered outside the complexities and articulations of power: for William Connolly, they are "thought-imbued energies" expressed as micropolitics, affective relations, material interactions, feelings, habits, and emotions that shape our intersubjective relations and judgments. Affects are thus made of sensorial experiences within a group of persons and depend on external factors. In my field, anger and guilt are emotions shared among family members of persons diagnosed with psychosis, schizophrenia, and other disabling psychiatric conditions, that intrinsically result from their affective entanglements with the psychiatric field and within their own familial relationships. As such, they are two of the main driving forces shaping one's positionality within these affective territories.

Anger

Anabella's mother died of cancer one year ago. Her cancer was preceded by two years of hospitalization in mental institutions, due to a mental crisis and a subsequent diagnosis of schizophrenia. We talked about it during a walk together one day, after work. On a Word document, she wrote down her mother's hospital journey, date by date, as it unfolded, to record events and to retain a memory of the dysfunctions of the healthcare system throughout the process. Because of her mental state, her mother's complaints of physical suffering were ignored for too long by the healthcare staff. This is, unfortunately, a far too frequent occurrence of epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007) experienced by psychiatric patients (Crichton et al. 2017; Kidd et al. 2022). As highlighted by reports across various countries and by a recent review of literature (see Linder 2024 or Gandré et al. 2022, 614), the life expectancy of people diagnosed with mental disorders is fifteen years lower than the general population and mortality rates are two to five times higher, whatever the main cause of death. The

authors of this review note that it is necessary to look at the role played by the healthcare system in this phenomenon, since access to physical care is more difficult for people with severe psychiatric disorders (Gandré et al. 2022, 616). This is in part due to prejudice leading to their testimonies being considered less credible by healthcare professionals (Linder 2024). In these circumstances, the act of writing, of recording and keeping a physical trace of the events, was, for Annabella, as it is for me, an act of love and anger. It was about fighting when confronted with the fragility of a life that is dear to us.

At the beginning of my research project, I put up a sticker with a quote from Marguerite Duras on the wall of my studio that said: "writing is screaming without noise".[4] From the beginning, one of the driving forces behind my project was anger. Traumatizing events happened under the purview of healthcare services during my sister's hospitalizations, and I was outraged at psychiatry as a whole. Anger is a motor: it drove me to pursue my goals in the field and gather important knowledge, but it can also blind one's perspective, destroying one's ability to recognize positive acts of care, for example. Anger still inhabits me, but in a different form to how it first existed. It became a signalling emotion *from, through*, and *with* which I learned to navigate the field and recognize nuance within it.

Although in practice it is often sidelined by healthcare services for various reasons, the anger of (former) psychiatric patients and their families is hardly a new phenomenon in psychiatry. It is a driving force in the anti-psychiatry movements, protests (mad pride, etc.), associative networks, and literature, from classic texts by Michel Foucault or Franco Basaglia to more contemporary literature (see LeFrançois et al. 2013; or Russo and Beresford 2015). Collective anger is mostly directed at psychiatry due to its ability, as an institution, to deprive people of their agency, autonomy, and voice in their most vulnerable moments, potentially with dramatic and long-lasting consequences on their lives. Literature has shown that psychiatric patients often experience epistemic injustice (Crichton et al. 2017; Kidd et al. 2022; Linder and Bovet 2024), when harm is done in undermining their capacity to engage in epistemic practices such as interpreting and making sense of their experiences (Crichton et al. 2017).

Guilt

Throughout the history of psychiatry, families have often had the unfortunate role of being portrayed as guilty for the mental condition of their relatives. For instance, "psy" sciences have promoted, until the 1970s, the model of the "schizophrenogenic mother" who was presumably guilty of causing the schizophrenia of her children. Such discourse was common parlance and can be found in Gregory Bateson's writings (1987).

Although the views presented above still exist, overall, the situation in the field has changed today. This transformation is visible in psycho-educative programmes for family members of persons with a diagnosis of schizophrenia. The possibility that families might be

[4] Author's translation. Original quote: "Écrire c'est aussi ne pas parler. C'est se taire. C'est hurler sans bruit." (Duras 1995, 28)

responsible is presented in the programme as a "myth" based on an inversion of causes and consequences, with harmful consequences for family members, who suffer high levels of guilt and depression. As argued by nurses in charge of the programme, "parents do not cause schizophrenia by their way of being or by the way they raise their children".

Schizophrenia is explained to programme participants in such a way, that it is arguably more about reducing guilt to reshape its impact within kin relationships, than about understanding what it really is. Nurses describe it as a biomedical "disease"; schizophrenia's origin is said to be mainly genetic, but no gene has been identified. When I asked several nurses in private interviews why they situated schizophrenia so strongly within neurobiology, they conceded after a short silence that it was because they didn't want to place guilt on parents. The authority of scientific knowledge thus serves the purpose of reshaping affects to decrease guilt, and this strategy has been found to be productive for participants. One participant told me that "schizophrenia can contribute to feeling shame and fear, both in relation to society and the family; the programme helped us to cope with that", while another person admitted that "it was a relief to learn who was the enemy: not my son, but the disease".

Anthropologists Jackson (2011) and Gable (2014, 250), argue that guilt is itself a "symptom of kinship", the result of a form of moral mutuality characteristic of kin relationships. Schizophrenia is not merely a label that corresponds to a series of symptoms but a complex condition involving deep emotional suffering affecting the kin group in manifold and long-lasting ways. Guilt may just be the lot of kin who love one another despite suffering.

Affective Territories, Positioning, and Knowledge Creation

Anger and guilt thus constitute emotional states that are integral to affective territories and positionings within psychiatric spaces. A focus on what is at stake in the constitution of these affective positions is a radical empirical approach (Jackson 1989), in the sense that it looks into the relationships *between* persons, instead of the individuals themselves (Davies 2010, 23) and integrates the ethnographer's position, experience, and emotions in the analysis. Emotions and affects generated by these positionings are simultaneously so stark and so intimate, and epistemic injustice is so prevalent, that it can be difficult to take a step back and see past them. The term "psychic privilege" is useful to refer to positionalities that render forms of psychic suffering invisible to the eyes of the person enjoying this privilege, thus providing the conditions of possibility for epistemic injustice. Privilege in psychiatry is often a question of which discourses are listened to and deemed worthy of being heard. The core of the inequalities and epistemic injustices in the field therefore often lies in the perceived legitimacy of situated discourses. Part of my research ethics in this context involves amplifying marginalized voices, in particular of those hospitalized; but as much as I listen to them, their experiences within psychiatric structures are most often inscribed in positionings and affective territories different to mine, so the intersubjective relationships I build with hospitalized patients are often unavoidably tainted by my own affective relationship with my sister. I thus could never claim to grasp the full picture of their emotional lives and experiences of hospitalization within a psychiatric ward. Many people, artists or social scientists, have

tried to live through this experience, by faking a psychiatric condition (see the Rosenhan experiment, 1973) or by taking similar drugs (like the anthropologist Sue Estroff 1981, for example). But an experiment is strikingly distinct from a real-life path, especially when considering experiences as impactful and painful as these. The phenomenology of the real experience is necessarily so different that the experience is not only biassed and phenomenologically inaccurate but is also ethically inadequate when one is in contact, in the field, with people who are deeply struggling in their lives.[5] Positionality and affects are constitutive of the knowledge we create, and this inability to fully grasp one's emotional experience of vulnerability when in a position of relative privilege is one of the most important reasons why researchers' voices emerging from a vulnerable positionality have such a powerful epistemic value for ethnography.

Relating Through Care and Solidarity in Situations of Vulnerability

Inside the Hospital's Karaoke

It can be difficult for researchers to respond with understanding and solidarity, when they fail to fully perceive where their interlocutors' vulnerabilities lie. In such circumstances, the notion of reciprocal vulnerability may be useful: it brings to the fore the relatedness and intimate connections between ethnographers' experiences of suffering and those of their interlocutors (Schild 2021). Through practices and ethics of care (Das 2007; Laugier 2016), forms of vulnerabilities that are affectively territorialized can be shaped into grassroot networks of solidarity within the field.

This is the case, for example, of the hospital's karaoke that has been running every week for at least the past ten years. Institutional memory doesn't go as far as to remember the karaoke's origin, and the staff team doesn't know when it was put in place, but they decided, due to the success of the activity and its alignment with the hospital's artistic centre agenda, that they would keep running it weekly. In fact, it is the only permanent activity at the artistic centre. "A classic", one resident told me. Despite this consistency, this space is generally of little interest to staff within the institutional organization. The karaoke is understood as an occupational activity only and not seen as part of therapy. The activity is led by an intern of the artistic centre, whose work is limited to ensuring the karaoke is properly installed and set up. But at 4pm, every Tuesday, you may hear voices coming down the stairs from people singing their hearts out. Most often, these people are not professional singers or musicians, but psychiatric patients experiencing moments of crisis unfolding differently.

I met Georges there; he has been going to the karaoke event for ten years. "It is my anti-depressant", he told me. He is a former patient; he was hospitalized twenty years ago, following the suicide of a family member. He was in his eighties when I met him. Georges sings well: he has a deep and gravelly voice. He likes to sing blues and swing: songs by Louis

[5] Sue Estroff for instance has been publicly criticized for this approach by psychiatry users' movements, see Russo and Beresford 2015.

Armstrong, Renaud, or Jacques Brel. We would sing duos, bringing together a high-pitched voice with a lower one.

I have found beauty in this space, and a kind of respite from the repression and control I have felt within other hospital spaces. At the karaoke, five to fifteen people gather and sing their vulnerability. People choose songs that have meaning to them and use their voices to express themselves freely. Sometimes, we dance. Sometimes, some cry. It is an emotionally powerful space, where people connect to each other and make friends. Solidarity and reciprocal vulnerability between patients are expressed here, sharing joy and raw feeling in moments of freedom, under otherwise heavier institutional constraints. In the social reality of this psychiatric hospital, everyone becomes a unique character, full of colours, fragilities, and eccentricities. The types of socialities expressed by individuals in the karaoke create new horizons for the expressions of one's own vulnerabilities, singularities, and forms of care for one another.

Inside Psychoeducation Programmes

I witnessed such spaces of solidarity and care flourishing around several psychiatric environments, where people were going through similar experiences. "I didn't come here for that, but I've made some valuable friends who have given me a lot of support in the association", a member of an association for families of people with schizophrenia tells me. The psycho-educative programmes described above (see section on guilt) constitute another one of these spaces of care. Family members seek support in developing new relationship skills with their loved one, to help them manage their emotions and cope better in difficult situations. In these programmes, members and participants act as a community of carers who are there to learn how to care for their relatives when confronted with schizophrenia or related diagnoses, and to be cared for and supported. People express their difficulties regarding hospitalizations, money, drug issues, etc. They discuss the impact schizophrenia has on their own lives, their experiences with the hallucinations of their relatives, or their relatives' difficulties with finding stability in their lives.

By building supportive communities, these structures fight against the taboo and stigma surrounding psychiatric diagnoses such as schizophrenia, reshaping their social relations and subjectivities, and thus reterritorializing their affective lives. By the time they start psychoeducation, family members have generally been in contact with psychiatric services for several years. They often feel helpless in their own situations, lost, angry at the system and at the lack of resources they have access to.

Most people in these associations and programmes are women, mainly mothers. The programme's statistics reveal how care work around mental health is gendered and performed in majority by women. Care is a key component of the way members of these communities understand and represent themselves. Their self-perceived inability to care satisfactorily for their loved ones explains their willingness to invest in a time-consuming programme, and to relearn their caring practices based on normative psycho-educative principles.

Being a programme participant was a condition of my presence as a researcher. Nurses and participants thus knew from the start that I myself was the sibling of someone diagnosed with psychosis. Disclosing this information in these psychoeducation programmes led to trust, transparency, and understanding of my position and research interests. In these spaces where participants share painful experiences and express emotions such as anger and guilt, unveiling this information indeed became a condition for the development of dynamics of solidarity through reciprocal vulnerability.

Unveiling Positioning in Academia: "Objective" Distance, Vulnerability, and Scientific Credibility

Mid-fieldwork, I presented my project in a seminar outside Switzerland. It was a difficult moment: a senior anthropologist disagreed with my methodology, in part because of the type of narrative and literary writing I had developed, and in part because of my approach towards vulnerability. My positionality came into question, as I had already unveiled the more personal aspects of my research interests to the fellow anthropologists attending this seminar, and I was told that I was not distant enough from my topic. The display of my friendships and care for people in the field through shared affects and vulnerabilities was seen as uncomfortable and problematic in the pursuit of more "objective" data. I was advised by this researcher that it was "better and easier to talk about things that [I am] not [personally] concerned with". I left this seminar feeling crushed and angry. Should I in fact hide how close the topic was to me?

At the time of this seminar, I was re-reading Jeanne Favret-Saada and taking inspiration from her approach to affects. She advocates for the study of exchanges of "feelings, perceptions and thoughts" (1990, 6), instead of a sole focus on representations. Already in her first book *Deadly Words* (1977), she denounces "folklorists'" disconnection to social reality in their approach to witchcraft: because of their distance from the field and lack of (affective) participation in it, they did not take actors and witchcraft seriously enough and came to incorrect conclusions. Following this feedback at the seminar, I decided to contact her and visit her in France. Our discussion there left me feeling more assured of my approach: one that doesn't look at social phenomena from afar, but chooses to study social phenomena *through* affects, whatever they may be, positive or negative, and whatever their intensity.

The pursuit of objectivity has been recognized as an illusion for many decades in the history of the discipline of anthropology (see Davies 2010; Herzfeld 2018). The "distant" position suggested in the critique of this more experienced scholar, arguably close to what Davies (2010) would call "traditional empiricism", would strike many of today's anthropologists as dubious, as research on emotionality continues to proliferate in its richness and diversity. Yet perhaps surprisingly, given this state of the literature, the event described above resonated with the academic experiences of several early career colleagues, who were in vulnerable positions in their own fields.

Unveiling my proximity to the topic has also been questioned in the name of ethics by the reviewers of an article that I wrote on psychoeducation programmes. They wondered if disclosing the fact that I too was an affected family member was not intrusive and deceitful. I did not understand these comments, since I announced from the start to all the participants

in the programme that I was there primarily for research purposes. I had obtained their consent and ensured their anonymity. The fact that I also came as a participant and disclosed this information was demanded by the nurses in charge of the programme and was a condition of my entrance in this space as a researcher. All this information was present in the article under review. It seems that the ethics of my research process was questioned precisely because I disclosed this part of my identity in the field. Despite the clearance of the project by the ethics review committee, sharing these aspects of my life was still considered ethically ambiguous by these reviewers. In a different occasion, after a colloquium presentation in which I disclosed the story of my sister and how it helped me bond with someone in the field, an anthropologist unbeknownst to me asked me about the risks of my position and approach. He was wondering about the risks of "victimization" with my approach to vulnerability, implying that I was necessarily in a privileged position as a researcher.

The feedback from both instances seemed indistinguishable from a denial of parts of my experience as a person and a researcher. They left me baffled and perplexed: why could I not simultaneously be in the privileged position of a funded researcher in academia, and in the less privileged position of a caretaker and family member of someone experiencing psychological difficulties? Privilege, or vulnerability, are rarely pure conditions. They are situational, relative social phenomena that exist on a scale and are to be understood within a constellation of factors. It also seemed to point towards a double standard that favours researchers who are not directly concerned by the issues they discuss in the name of objectivity and ethics. The second situation also left me feeling overlooked and seemingly inverted the problem: instead of understanding the privilege of having a funded platform in academia as an opportunity to talk about issues of vulnerabilities, such privilege would necessarily overshadow and have the power to erase less privileged aspects of my life, including the reason why I was doing research in the first place.

Conferences generate environments where one should give an impression of "non-vulnerability": they are spaces where, to professionally succeed, one should be able to have answers, know better, and in particular, not fail. It further reinforces the sense that to be scientifically credible, one must be detached from the suffering potentially happening in their field, and their potential relation to it, as if the field is not and should not really be their life: academia is. But this affirmation does not ring true for many anthropologists, since anthropological knowledge is broadly built upon this ambiguity of belonging. This duality between immersion in the field and in academia is precisely why the knowledge we generate is valuable.

While vulnerability is at the centre of preoccupations and creates subcultures of care practices in the field, vulnerability often remains taboo in academic cultures. Despite the high prevalence of burnouts and depressions within academia, publicly talking about personal vulnerability often entails a personal cost. Disclosure of one's vulnerability in this setting, with the discomfort that usually unfolds afterwards, can become a certain form of activism against a culture unwelcoming of such self-exposure. Academic competition and individualistic interests contribute to erode the solidarity and care that might emerge between researchers. As a discipline, anthropology exists within institutional and financial constraints; even when research approaches based on emotional responses are valued within the field, researchers often have to compose with more conventional methodologies to navigate academic spaces. Interdisciplinary spaces, where emotions and subjectivity are valued less

than quantifiable data can also impede this kind of qualitative research. Gender dynamics also played a role: womanhood is assumed to be vulnerable; if, in addition, I indeed started showing vulnerability, it felt shameful and weak.

All of these elements contribute towards creating cultures that value researchers who show detachment, restraint, and ways to be emotionally "above and beyond" our interlocutors in the field. However, unveiling one's positioning is a repeated process, and some spaces in academia also provide more opportunities to flourish. Support can be provided in the form of secure contracts and institutional avail. My discussions with Jeanne Favret-Saada and the professor mentioned at the beginning of this article were also reassuring. These moments, among others, constituted environments where vulnerability was recognized, the approach valued and in which I could receive astute and reflective feedback to develop this methodology.

Despite calls to decolonize anthropology that would be facilitated by reflexivity, doing "anthropology at home", and studying the Global North as much as the South, there is still a sense in the discipline that "the more unfamiliar the subject is from the ethnographer's own identity and experiences, arguably, the greater the sense of validity of the research" (Collins and Gallinat 2013, 8 in Anderson 2021, 1). This is due in part to the "perceived lack of objectivity and degree of difference" of researchers-at-home (Anderson 2021, 2). Literature by academic researchers in the field of mad studies[6] helped me counterbalance such viewpoints. By reappropriating the label of "madness", these scholars placed their identification as mad as their primary asset, expressing a response to the epistemic injustice they endure and advocating in favour of a close engagement with the world for the generation of ethnographic knowledge (Costa 2014; LeFrançois et al. 2013). They highlight that they are tired of being objectified by academics, anthropologists included (Russo and Beresford 2015). "We often find ourselves giving not just our story but also the knowledge that has emerged from our experiences only to have it re-framed, serving various purposes and different agendas, and ultimately alienated from us" (Russo and Beresford 2015, 153). They denounce the absenting of their perspectives in scholarly work, the "prompt detachment of concepts (...) from the realities they claim to illuminate" and "the longstanding academic habit of avoiding a dialogue with subjects of their interest outside traditionally divided research roles" (Russo and Beresford 2015, 154).

The cultures of academic anthropology thus seem to have a paradoxical relationship to vulnerability. On the one hand, difficult subjects and challenging field sites are encouraged, and the ethics and positionality of the researcher towards them are always thoroughly interrogated, sometimes without considering the risk of (re-)traumatization. On the other hand, although our lives are not always easy to compartmentalize, academic circles do not always successfully support this type of vulnerability in their own spaces (Nair Ambujam 2021), and scientific credibility is still often contingent to an impression of emotional non-vulnerability and "objective" distance. Anderson (2021, 2) notes that "as a methodological practice, conducting research in familiar places is characterised as providing automatic insider status (Wiederhold 2014), or as being a threat to the illusion of objectivity (Heley 2011)." But this positionality and the resulting affects are also precisely what can generate forms of knowledge that would otherwise remain inaccessible to the researcher, as argued by anthropologists like Jeanne Favret-Saada and Angela Garcia (2010).

[6] See the *International Mad Studies Journal*, https://imsj.org/.

Conclusion

Anthropologists are narrators but also embodied beings who exist through the potentially difficult social realities they describe, and whose tangible experiences participate in shaping their words. We exist through stories, and our ethnographic storytelling constitutes an integral part of the way we produce anthropological knowledge (Narayan 2012). Narrative and theoretical categories depend on each other, and positionality is particularly crucial for storytelling. One's own positionality and affective entanglements always shape the data. Unveiling such positionality allowed me to find my voice and integrate it into my analysis and the way I narrate my ethnographic experience. Furthermore, a story might be one of the only elements left available to people in situations of vulnerability, deprivation, or dispossession, and can be particularly valuable in contexts where epistemic violence (Spivak 1988) prevails. Academia can be a space for these stories, their affective territorializations, and positionings when narrated with analytical insight and care.

Unveiling one's personal vulnerability in the field and in the academic world has led to different reactions and emotions. While it often led to fears in academia, this information also helped to create mutual understanding, friendships, and relationships of care and solidarity in some spaces in the field. Depending on the context, I was either perceived as too close or too distant: I was often seen as being (too) close to my subject in academic spheres, but conversely so in the field: since I did not come from the same region, and as an academic, I was generally considered rather distant from the topic. This ambivalence probably reveals more about personal views on the subject matter and on the type of extreme vulnerabilities present in this research, than about my own relationship with it.

Vulnerability in all its forms can constitute productive and creative impulses and lead to specific competences. It can generate curiosity, a will for transformation and a process-oriented approach towards knowledge. The professor described at the beginning of this article, who was told as a young scholar that it was "academic suicide" to pursue such difficult and emotionally loaded fieldwork, wrote a highly influential book out of this project. It illustrates a paradox in anthropology: a frequent lack of consideration for human fragility in relationships between fellow researchers, and the epistemological value ascribed to reflexive inquiries into affective and political entanglements of social sufferings.

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RETHINKING THE ROLE OF PAYMENTS IN RESEARCH

Reflections Towards a Collaborative Ethnographic Approach

Lise Woensdregt

Abstract

Navigating payments in ethnographic research provides insights into social dynamics within ethnographic research contexts. Drawing from research with financially vulnerable queer male sex workers in Nairobi, Kenya, this article explores the meanings of money, privilege, and reciprocity within this specific socio-cultural setting. Reflecting on my position as a researcher from the Global North, it acknowledges privileges and addresses academic vulnerabilities resulting from unconventional research practices. By examining the roles of payments and reciprocity in research relationships, this article calls for reassessment of payment norms when engaging with economically marginalized communities. It highlights challenges in discussing these matters openly in academic circles and advocates for increased transparency and dialogue about financial aspects of fieldwork with interlocutors. The shift towards mutual collaboration outlined in this article fosters balanced reciprocity, ultimately facilitating the co-production of socially relevant anthropological knowledge aimed at promoting social justice and transformation for marginalized communities.

Keywords: *payments, fieldwork, ethnography, positionality, reciprocity, co-creation*

On a sunny afternoon in July 2022, I visit the sex worker organization (SLO) I conduct my research with in Nairobi again after two years of absence due to the COVID-19 pandemic. People welcome me enthusiastically, and I receive a lot of hugs. After sharing how I am doing, some of them ask me if I brought them something. One of them, Jimi, says "Lise, I'm hungry, please buy me lunch". While I interact with a core group of around 30 men, Jimi has been among my long-term contacts, actively involved in my research since the beginning. Although not entirely truthful, I inform him that I can't due to not carrying cash. While a pang of guilt accompanies my lie, I decide to say so, knowing that I did not bring enough cash to provide lunch for everyone present. After having chatted with people for a while, I say I have to leave. Jimi asks me if he can escort me out. Of course, I say, since I like his gesture. Yet, despite my genuine appreciation, a subtle thought lingers in the back of my mind—wondering whether he might expect something in return for his escort, though I'm reluctant to admit such thoughts.

As we walk away from the rest of the group, another member named Baruch joins us. I don't know him yet. He inquiries about my activities. When I tell him about my future plans to conduct research on queer entrepreneurship in Nairobi, he expresses his interest. Additionally, he asks me "how can the [sex worker] community benefit from this research?" I tell him that my

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previous research with sex workers showed that many of them are entrepreneurial, and that this is something I would like to explore further. I add that I think this can benefit the community since it will show the many development organizations the SLO engages with the need to go beyond providing services to sex workers aimed at sexual health only. He says he likes the idea and shares that he knows some queers who ventured into such businesses, for instance someone who started a barber shop and someone else who sells clothes. We agree that we will explore the city over the next days to connect with various queer-led businesses.

As our conversation unfolds, Jimi proposes to take me to their new "joint", which is a place where members of the SLO hang out. Since I don't want to stop my conversation with Baruch, I affirm his suggestion. While walking to the joint, when we pass a liquor store, Jimi and one of his friends attempt to persuade me into purchasing alcohol for them. "It's just 700 KES" Jimi says. "You could buy it now, and we will drink it tonight". His friend chimes in: "We could drink it right away." Given my awareness of both individuals' struggles with alcohol, I develop a sense of discomfort and quickly make up my mind. I tell him I will not buy alcohol for them but can buy them lunch if they want. Jimi agrees and we walk to the restaurant.

Once we arrive at the joint, I see seven other community members sitting there. Uncertain what to do, I find a seat along them. Almost immediately one of them assures me: "Don't worry, mine is only 100." Jimi's friend joins me and remarks: "I've ordered for 300, so I can take some home tonight. I need a good meal because of my medicines." Following suit, the remaining eight individuals proceed to place their own food orders. While this is exactly what I was afraid would happen, in my mind I surrender and laugh about the situation I got myself into once again. And when I see the bill, I am relieved to find that I brought enough cash to cover the entire costs.

After our meal, Jimi accompanies me to a car. Along the way, a woman seated beside her food stall says something to Jimi in Sheng, an urban dialect commonly spoken in Nairobi. He responds, and they both burst into laughter. Later, Jimi tells me that she jokingly asked him to request me to buy her a soda, playfully stating: "You know, when these people see a white person, they see money." Given my light ("white") skin tone, I am not surprised. My interlocutors frequently note that my skin colour is associated with affluence, leading to certain expectations regarding what I might provide, such as drinks, food, or money for transportation. Reflecting on my experiences in the past hour, I feel that they validate this observation. With these thoughts and experiences in mind, I look at Jimi and say: "I know, but isn't it somewhat similar for you guys?" He chuckles but also responds seriously, "Noooo, Lise, this is different; what we have is friendship." Jimi referring to me as a friend warms my heart and elicits a smile. Simultaneously, I recognize that it took me a long time to come to terms with the meaning of this "friendship", especially considering the significant role money and payments play within it.

Introduction

As the opening vignette illustrates, money is an undercurrent in my long-term collaborative research with queer male sex workers in Nairobi. While it has never been my primary research topic, it has significantly influenced my interactions in the field and my research relationships more generally.

My research with queer male sex workers in Nairobi started as my PhD project in 2018, focusing on knowledge politics in development partnerships in the official development aid (ODA) system (Woensdregt 2024). The participants in this research identify as both queer and sex workers, identities that are (implicitly) criminalized in the Kenyan context. They live within an environment of economic instability, compelling them to engage in daily economic activities outside of sex work to meet their basic needs. Although the income they typically generate is sufficient for day-to-day survival, it often falls short of covering larger expenditures such as unexpected medical bills. This puts them in the lower (but not lowest) tiers of economic stratifications in Nairobi, along with at least 75% of the city's population.

Throughout the research process, I have been highly conscious of and reflexive about my positionalities, privileges, and subjectivities vis-à-vis the people I work with. As a researcher from the Global North studying the position of financially vulnerable Kenyan sex workers in the ODA system, it was clear from the outset that I was navigating a context of stark material inequalities. I was highly conscious of the economic differences and the ways in which privilege and marginalization manifest due to intersections of factors including race, class, and geographical location. The opening vignette illustrates how this sensitivity towards issues of positionality, privilege, and difference was not only a vital part of my approach to engaged research but was also repeatedly—sometimes explicitly, often implicitly—expected of me by the sex workers I met during my research. Baruch's question about how the sex worker community can benefit from my research exemplifies this expectation.

Reciprocity, or the dynamics of "giving and receiving", is a central element in the forging and maintenance of human relations and one of the most important concepts in anthropology (De Regt 2019). Reciprocity as a practice of mutual exchange in fieldwork mitigates the imbalances of power, enabling us to conduct research "with" rather than "on" our participants and to be considerate of the ways in which research engages and benefits them (Pillow 2003). However, discussions of reciprocity have primarily focused on its social and emotional dimensions, with much less attention given to its financial aspects (von Vacano 2019).

In this article, I delve deeper into the complex intersections of money and reciprocity within research relationships marked by material inequalities. My focus is on both the direct and indirect payments researchers make to their interlocutors, and how this can contribute to fostering reciprocal relationships. Such an enhanced understanding is crucial, given that the current lack of discourse disproportionately affects the emotions and actions of scholars conducting fieldwork in contexts of material inequalities. Von Vacano (2019) argues that young scholars, in particular, express feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, grappling with the appropriateness of their actions. Similarly, Lücking (2019) describes how researchers were taken aback, frustrated, and annoyed by their interlocutors' expectations of material support, especially from individuals with whom they have developed close relationships with in the field. The combination of feelings of disillusionment, disappointment, and surprise makes establishing reciprocity a challenging undertaking, highlighting the need for more insight and guidance on this matter.

How can material differences between researchers and interlocutors be bridged, rather than leading to an impasse (Nagar and Geiger 2007), to foster ethical and reflexive research practices that benefit marginalized communities? Furthermore, what insights can we gain from

anthropologists who employ participatory research methods and Community-led Research and Action (CLRA) (see Woensdregt, Rwigi, and van Stapele 2023) to co-create knowledge with communities and collaboratively work towards social change? These are the central questions I aim to address in this article, drawing from my extensive ethnographic and increasingly collaborative research with queer male sex workers in Nairobi, Kenya. I do so with specific focus on the relationships between relatively affluent researchers based in the Global North conducting research with financially vulnerable communities located in the Global South, since this is the position from which I am writing.

The contribution of this article is threefold. Firstly, by critically examining the current discourse surrounding payments to interlocutors within contexts of inequality, it delves into the potential of payments to address inequalities in fieldwork settings and how this might impact anthropological knowledge production. Secondly, by discussing how payments to interlocutors have strengthened my research relationships, it offers the possibility of exploring alternative forms of reciprocity diverging from conventional practices. Simultaneously, it challenges dominant perspectives that view payments in research relationships as taboo. Thirdly, drawing from participatory and CLRA methods, it demonstrates how shifting towards mutual collaboration in research cultivates feelings of increased mutuality and a sense of relatedness and intimate connection that allows my interlocutors and me to build solidarities across our differences in terms of privileges and material inequalities.

The next section begins by addressing the taboo nature of payments in anthropological research. I will then explain how these perceptions impacted my emotional experiences while conducting research with queer sex workers, aligning with the focus of this special issue on examining how researchers' vulnerabilities shape ethnographic knowledge production. Following this, I will illustrate how these emotional insights prompted me to explore alternative forms of reciprocity, concluding with a reflecting on how my evolving approach to collaboration with interlocutors enables me to provide more direct support and care in the context of my research.

Payments as a Dirty Word in Relation to Research Relationships

While reciprocity is a fundamental concept in anthropology, researchers often set clear boundaries regarding financial matters. In debates on field ethics, paying informants for interviews is considered inappropriate, as this may compromise the perceived objectivity of the data. Such payments are frequently framed as akin to "paying for information" and are often considered taboo, contributing to the commodification of data (Colvin 2014). There is a concern that "hiring" respondents could disrupt the field, disadvantaging students and researchers with limited funding (Das and Parry 1983). Additionally, it is implicitly assumed that financial incentives might compromise the quality and authenticity of the collected data. From the perspective of interlocutors, scholars worry that offering money to respondents could lead to increased financial expectations and blur the lines between motivation, voluntariness, and consent (Bungay et al. 2022). From the perspective of researchers, sharing information about their own financial situation is avoided, as this may highlight the often stark material inequal-

ities between researcher and researched (De Regt 2019). As a result of such assumptions, Cheng (2022) concludes that anthropologists rarely discuss the role of money in the field, despite the likelihood that "every researcher who has done fieldwork has a story of money to tell..." (Cheng 2022, 17).

Specifically, regarding reciprocity, direct payments are often viewed as impersonal or inappropriate. Such payments are sometimes interpreted as a form of pay-off or as a gesture of sympathy towards the interlocutor's living conditions (Lücking 2017). It is suggested that these payments can undermine the personal nature of the ethnographic research relationship, introducing a market logic into the research process. This can lead to what Graeber (2001, 221) refers to as "closed reciprocity". While open reciprocity is believed to foster emotional and social bonds of ongoing commitment, "closed reciprocity" is thought to result in the termination of social relationships through meticulously calculated forms of monetary compensation (Graeber 2001, 220). Consequently, it is argued, that offering direct payments runs the risk of depersonalizing the relationship and perpetuating power imbalances, thereby reinforcing hierarchies between researchers and subjects.

Following the disciplinary scepticism surrounding direct payments to interlocutors, anthropologists often resort to alternative approaches to "giving back", to mitigate the inequality between researchers and researched. These approaches may include providing emotional or practical support, recognition, advocacy, labour, and tangible goods such as food or gift cards (Colvin 2014; Lücking 2017). Von Vacano (2019), who conducted research in a context of material inequalities in Indonesia, argues that such alternative efforts to "give back" in research relationships often reflect an idealistic, anti-market bias. The author suggests that while these efforts are well-intentioned, they contribute to the de-economization of research relationships and may not always align with the actual needs of interlocutors. I recognize this in my own research context. Despite being welcomed by the sex workers, from their perspective, these alternatives fall short. They frequently expressed desires to direct financial compensation, as this often makes a more immediate and tangible difference in their lives.

In this article, I call for the unsettling of dominant perspectives that perceive direct payments in ethnographic research as something to be avoided. In developing this argument, I follow anthropologists who theorize how payments can positively shape their research relationships, ethnographic experiences, and anthropological knowledge production more generally. These scholars highlight the functional role of payments in building and maintaining bonds of trust. For example, Cheng (2022) explores interactions with migrant women engaged in sex work and demonstrates how direct payments can facilitate access to the time, space, and experiences of interlocutors. Similarly, Cajas and Perez (2017) describe payments as a strategy for initiating, maintaining, nurturing, and restoring relationships with their interlocutors. De Regt (2019) reflects on the meaning of money in her friendship with a key interlocutor in her research in Yemen, concluding that her financial transactions contributed to their friendship, imbuing it with material significance. Drawing from this body of work, I aim to further problematize the prevailing disciplinary approach to conceptualizing and handling payments in the context of anthropological research. I advocate for the recognition of direct payments as a legitimate and integral component of the research process.

Conducting Research With Queer Male Sex Workers in Nairobi

As briefly stated in the introduction, I have been conducting long-term ethnographic research with a sex worker-led organization (SLO) in Nairobi, Kenya, since 2018. My research heavily relies on participant observation, which has enabled me to build relationships with a core group of around 30 men. In 2018, I also took part in 20 CLRA sessions, during which ten community researchers frequently discussed their everyday lived realities, including sex workers' understanding of and relationships with money. Since I live in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, beyond designated periods of fieldwork, I maintain contact with some of the men through WhatsApp. This allows me to do fieldwork in an online space (Postill and Pink 2012).

The theoretical discussion above highlighted the contentious nature of directly paying participants in research. However, globally, compensating sex workers for their participation in research is widely accepted and even considered an ethical obligation. This practice is grounded in the belief that reimbursement acknowledges the value of sex workers' time and knowledge while helping to offset any potential loss of income incurred during their involvement in research (Reed et al. 2014). Compensating interlocutors is not only part of ethical sex work research, but also something the men in my research consistently demand from me and others.

As part of the SLO, the sex workers in my research frequently interact with researchers and development workers within the framework of ODA system, participating in activities such as workshops or interviews. In exchange for their involvement, sex workers demand allowances and reimbursements, commonly referred to as "stipends" and "transport money". These amounts, typically ranging between 500 and 2000 KES, significantly contribute to their monthly income. In 2018, Cashmama, one of my interlocutors, explained why he expects such compensation: "If they call me... they will pay. Because they have called me, and maybe I had other things to do, so they will pay me for my lunch and transport as well." Drawing from his rationale, I have always compensated participants for their involvement in formal research activities such as interviews and workshops. While this practice familiarized me with directly paying interlocutors, it did not eliminate other concerns and dilemmas regarding money, particularly those arising outside of specific research settings and times.

As I illustrated in the opening vignette, the material inequalities between my interlocutors and me undoubtedly created expectations regarding what I could provide financially. Over the years, I frequently received requests for support, ranging from small needs like lunch, as described above, to significant needs such as hospital bills, bail costs, and rent. In the beginning of my research, each time I received such requests, a knot would form in my stomach, generating anxiety and leaving me uncertain about how to proceed. The requests were typically for modest amounts, so it wasn't a matter of lacking funds. Instead, I felt uncomfortable. Having internalized the disciplinary scepticism towards paying participants, I worried that giving money to some but not to others would disrupt my access to this group. I feared that not responding to interlocutors' requests would sabotage my relationship with them altogether, even though I wanted to stay in touch with them.

Since I understood that money in the context of fieldwork was considered a taboo, I hesitated to discuss this issue with other academics apart from my supervisors. I feared how other researchers would perceive me, and worried that those unfamiliar with the specific context

would view me as compensating participants for information, potentially undermining the authenticity of my access. Unfortunately, some interactions with colleagues substantiated these concerns.

For example, during a summer school focused on fieldwork challenges, I shared my dilemmas related to paying interlocutors for their time and efforts. One student responded with disapproval, accusing me of creating an expectation of payment that could disadvantage less privileged researchers. On another instance, a colleague simplistically suggested that my work was "very easy" because it revolved around compensating respondents. Another academic who similarly worked in an East-African country remained more neutral in her response. While she acknowledged her own experiences, she deemed the subject too intricate to address in her writings. Such encounters made me feel academically vulnerable and hesitant to further share and discuss this issue with others.

Looking back, I realize that I could have sought for information and allies in places I had not considered at the time. However, faced with the silence surrounding this topic, I initially responded by distancing myself from financial requests, often politely ignoring or feigning an inability to pay, reflecting the scenario described in the opening vignette. As my research progressed, however, I felt increasingly uncomfortable with this approach. Restricting my financial support to official research activities while neglecting other urgent needs of my interlocutors mirrored the detachment I often observed among researchers, policy makers, and development workers within the ODA system—something I had criticized for perpetuating a hierarchical status quo between both parties (Woensdregt 2024). I desired a different type of relationship with my interlocutors, one that diverged from their usual interactions with the ODA system. I also perceived our relationships as distinct because they were characterized by their prolonged duration and the blending of personal and professional boundaries. I recognized the imperative to address and proactively manage my emotions regarding payments and sought to develop strategies fostering a more constructive engagement with this issue for both myself and my interlocutors. Discussing this matter with my interlocutors strongly contributed to this position, and I will elaborate on this below.

Can We Talk About Money?

Yaro and I had gotten to know each other in 2018. In 2021, I supported him financially after he experienced a homophobic attack, paying his rent for several months. When he moved back to his village during the COVID-19 pandemic, we continued to talk over Zoom, often on his initiative. Several times, he asked me for financial support afterward. Each time he asked me for money, I could not help but feel disappointed, since it felt like he used our conversations to gain extra money. Interestingly, I had no problem paying for his rent after he experienced the attack. Reflecting on this, it is probably because the situation was extremely urgent, a matter of life and death, which extended our personal relationships. Contrastingly, being asked for a payment after an informal conversation triggered disappointment, as I thought we were developing a personal relationship. Being asked for money challenged my desire to have a relationship based on mutual interest and affection (see also De Regt 2019).

One day, during a discussion about the CLRA research project we conducted and our respective roles within it—I as the facilitator and he as a community-researcher—we touched upon matters of representation. I expressed my occasional insecurity about accurately representing the community in my writings, given the differences between us. His response was, "You stand out exceptionally yes. We always have the notion that whites have money". While this wasn't precisely what I had meant, I saw it as an opportunity to discuss the financial aspects of my research relationships with interlocutors. Seeing it as a conversation opener, I asked him:

> *Can we talk about money? I don't like to be seen as someone who has money. Of course, I know I have more money than most people in the community, but I don't like it. It makes me cautious. Are people actually interested or is it only because they think I have more money?*

Reflecting on my words, I now recognize a sense of awkwardness and naivety in my approach. I understand that I oversimplified the complexities of research relationships by reducing interlocutors to a binary framework of either being interested in me or "my money". My words reveal the struggle I experienced in reconciling the material and emotional dimensions inherent in research relationships. They also hint at an assumed equality in my relationship with interlocutors, failing to account for the inherent uneven distribution of resources between myself and my interlocutors that understandably fuel expectations regarding what I can provide to them. Yaro's answer to my question reflects these expectations:

> *I think it depends from person to person. It depends on someone's mindset or their abilities. When I see a white person, let me talk about myself. When I see Lise, I ask myself what opportunity can she offer me because I have the skills, I can apply and make my own money [if I would only have the financial opportunity to do so].*

The way Yaro describes how he sees me corresponds to what Chege (2017) termed "family friends" in the context of male beach workers on the Kenyan coast. A family friend in this context is a special friend who holds a special place within the beach workers' social networks, grounded on stereotypes that the men and their communities hold about *muzungu,* the Swahili term for "foreigner", which is often used to refer to white people. Mzungus are considered essentially wealthy, understanding, and generous. By seeking family friends, the men in Chege's study seek to establish economically motivated friendships with foreign tourists, which she understands as livelihood strategies in a context of limited hope.

Whereas Chege's idea of family friends is rooted in relationships between beach workers and a foreigner, payment requests are also embedded in the Kenyan socio-cultural monetary practice of *ku-toanisha*. Van Stapele (2019) describes how in Kenya, a substantial portion of social interactions is underpinned by monetary transactions. In relationships, the act of giving money is deemed proof of emotional commitment from one person who is more well-off to another. The monetary practice of *toanisha* is widespread among Kenyans and connotes a practice in which one person persuades another to give them a small amount of money to spend on food, drinks, transport, *khat*, and other small items. In general, this practice is associated with relationships between men and women and plays into dominant gender norms of

the male provider and female dependent. However, it can also intersect with class positions and age, allowing some men to also *toanisha* fellow men and even women who are considered older, wealthier and/or otherwise more powerful (see also van Stapele 2019). Applying this to my research context helped me to see that my interlocutors *toanisha* people they consider more wealthy all the time, both foreigners and Kenyans. For example, interlocutors have regular clients they call upon when they are in need of money. In addition, they call upon friends and fellow sex workers in their social networks who are deemed wealthier, even if only momentarily. I started to see that from my interlocutors' perspective, forming a socio-financial connection with me and others entails gaining access not only to financial resources but also to other benefits rooted in social capital, such as networks and opportunities that might otherwise be challenging to attain. Understanding this practice helped me recognize that by asking me to make specific payments, interlocutors strategically positioned themselves vis-à-vis me as a wealthier person to access resources that can help them accomplish short-and long-term goals.

Balancing Reciprocity

Throughout the process of gaining an improved understanding of the role payments play in my research and its relationships, I realized that for a long time, my focus was primarily on how others perceived me rather than on understanding their perspective. I neglected to consider my own position and failed to ask myself what paying interlocutors meant for my research and its relationships.

Upon reflection, I realized that offering direct payments helps me achieve my research goals by strengthening the personal relationships that are at the core of engaged research. While Graeber (2001, 221) suggests that payments introduce a market logic into the process, risking the depersonalization of the relationship and perpetuating power imbalances, I experience that offering direct payments foster access to interlocutors' time, experiences, and perspectives. For example, by paying Yaro for our discussions, I spoke with him frequently. Our conversations also became more personal, providing opportunities for deeper learning about his life and his relationship with others. Similarly, Baruch who occasionally reaches out for modest financial contributions, has now become one of my key interlocutors. When I am in the Netherlands, our almost daily conversations on WhatsApp allow us to stay connected and exchange insights about queer men's lives in Nairobi. The financial contributions I make do not define our conversations, but they do facilitate personal relationships and a sense of intimacy and relatedness that might otherwise be hard to achieve. I learn a lot from our conversations, and I also know that when I come to Nairobi, he will take care of me and accompany me to places where queer sex workers meet and work, which would otherwise be difficult for me to access. In this context, sex workers are not only benefiting from my social capital; I am also leveraging their social capital to achieve my research goals.

At this point, I am uncertain how my research relationships will evolve over time and how the financial aspect will influence them. Experience shows that balancing material imbalances in research relationships is delicate and runs the risk of coming under pressure when payments

cease. For instance, my communication with Yaro has waned since I stopped providing financial assistance. To navigate this balance carefully, I am increasingly moving towards more equitable research engagements with my interlocutors, where they are paid a salary, and we work together as colleagues. This helps to overcome some of the power imbalances between us, although material inequalities persist.

Reimagining Relationships: From Friendship to Collaboration

As the previous section demonstrates, engaging with queer sex workers over the long term, discussing the rationale behind payments, and situating these within a larger socio-political context has deepened my understanding of the economic realities of sex workers realities and facilitated a more nuanced approach to managing payments. Nonetheless, in recent years, I have increasingly grappled with the realization that despite periodically paying and financially supporting interlocutors, the benefits they receive from their involvement in my research remain relatively modest, which feels inadequate considering both their needs and their contributions.

My long-term engagement with queer sex workers has provided me with a deeper understanding of the everyday economic realities they navigate, including their pursuit for economic opportunities. Ongoing reflections on my positionality and privileges have fuelled a desire to make more substantial and lasting contributions to their needs and aspirations. In this sense, I prefer to support them when they engage in economic activities, particularly in small businesses or entrepreneurial ventures with a focus on long-term goals beyond basic necessities. Consequently, I am inclined to make purchases or offer support by buying the products they sell. However, I have learned the importance of maintaining a sense of balance in these situations. For instance, there was an occasion when someone approached me for assistance in starting a grocery shop. Given our longstanding connection, my belief in their potential, and their substantial savings, I decided to complement their funds. Their gratitude was evident, and they expressed the strong opinion not to let this opportunity slip away. This experience reaffirmed my belief in the value of financial support as a means to unlock otherwise inaccessible opportunities. After reviewing their business plan and related documents, I transferred the funds to cover the stall's rent and deposit. Afterwards, I never heard back from him, and I remain unaware of the outcome. While this experience has not deterred me from supporting other interlocutors with similar aspirations, it has taught me to be more strategic when considering larger donations. At the same time, I frequently wrestle with the arbitrary nature of providing financial support to certain interlocutors while not extending the same to others.

In this context, Baruch's question, which I described in the opening vignette—"how can the [sex worker] community benefit from this research?"—has pushed me in trying to become much more inclusive in my research practices. Currently, with regard to my research in Kenya, I am particularly interested in co-creative research projects where I can hire sex workers as co-researchers and collaborate with them. Currently, in collaboration with five key interlocutors, we have developed a CLRA research project that began in June 2024. This project addresses the structural challenge of achieving economic stability for financially vulnerable queer men engaged in sex work in Nairobi. Our goal is to explore pathways to financial auton-

omy and stability for queer men, with a specific focus on queer entrepreneurship. We aim to inspire and provide the broader queer male sex worker community in Nairobi and across Kenya, enhancing their "economic empowerment" as the co-researchers would say.

One of the key principles of this research is that it relies on long-term, sustained reciprocal relationships that are mutually beneficial, facilitated by the combined and generative knowledge and the deepened connections and networks developed among all partners (Cornish et al. 2023). While the project officially started in June 2024, our collaboration began in January 2023 with the design and writing of the research proposal and securing the grant. In the process, instead of engaging in a traditional researcher-participant dynamic, we have established collaborative working relationships. We meet regularly and openly discuss our roles and responsibilities, fostering a sense of trust, openness, and relatedness. This approach creates a space where we can build solidarities across our differences in terms of privileges and inequalities. Concerning the material inequalities, we addressed financial aspects from the outset, setting clear expectations to ensure transparency and clarity. For example, the co-researchers were informed about the budget, participated in its design, and defined their own salaries as part of this process. And now that the project has started, it is evident that such transparency alleviates insecurities around payments on both sides.

Despite advancing towards more collaborative ethnographic approaches, material inequalities between me and my co-researchers continue to exist. In this specific context, I find that rather than striving to fulfil an ideal of a "genuine" research relationship or friendship, collaborative research relationships can foster increased mutuality, a sense of relatedness and intimate connection as we work towards a common goal. This dynamic, in turn, facilitates the co-production of socially relevant anthropological knowledge aimed at social justice and transformation.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to explore how material differences between researchers and interlocutors can be bridged to foster ethical and reflexive research practices that benefit marginalized communities, such as sex workers. It also examines what can be learned from anthropologists who employ participatory and CLRA methods to collaboratively work with communities towards social change.

The article has addressed the perception of payments as taboo in anthropological research, where direct payments are often viewed as impersonal and potentially undermining the personal nature of ethnographic relationships. This perspective is informed by the notion of "closed reciprocity" (Graeber 2001), which raises concerns about how payments may depersonalize relationships, perpetuate power imbalances, and potentially terminate essential social connections necessary for meaningful ethnographic research.

The experiences described in this article illustrate that, rather than depersonalizing research relationships, payments can indeed strengthen them. The article illustrates how payments facilitate prolonged access to sex workers' time, experiences, and perspectives, enabling more personal conversations and deeper insights into their lives, including their economic realities.

Additionally, these payments create a space for open discussions about my perceived vulnerabilities regarding financial transactions with my interlocutors. Theoretically, this supports the previously established notion that material aspects are important in developing research relationships (e.g., De Regt 2019; Cheng 2022; Vanderstaay 2005).

The findings provide additional insight into the specific role of payments in relationships with sex workers who are accustomed to a "payment for participation" logic as well as the practice of *toanisha.* These insights explain how the role of the ethnographer is perceived from the standpoint of interlocutors, highlighting their expectations regarding money and payments.

In answering the question of what can be learned from anthropologists who work collaboratively with communities, this article illustrates that shifting towards mutual collaboration—where interlocutors are compensated for their involvement and there is transparency about budgets and salaries—helps to alleviate insecurities around payments. Moreover, such an approach fosters increased mutuality and balanced reciprocity, moving beyond idealized notions of "genuine" research relationships or friendship towards a more equitable engagement.

This article highlighted the difficulties young academics face in discussing payments within academic circles and advocates for greater transparency and dialogue, both among colleagues and with interlocutors. To support young researchers, it is crucial to reconsider and redefine the role of payments in research, particularly in contexts involving economically disadvantaged individuals and communities. Enhanced transparency and open dialogue, where experienced researchers share their experiences and insights regarding the financial aspects of fieldwork, are essential to this effort. Equally important is challenging discourses that maintain neutrality and silence among the economically privileged, recognizing that such silence may serve to perpetuate existing inequalities. Therefore, this article calls for more openness and discussion about these critical issues.

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IT TAKES MORE THAN ONE TO HOLD COMPLEXITY

Irritation and Collective Reflexivity in Ethnographic Research

Anna Hänni

Abstract

This article discusses the potentials and challenges of psychoanalytically oriented supervision groups for ethnographic fieldwork: interpretive, collective spaces that address ethnographic fieldwork's subconscious, emotional, and experiential aspects. While notions of scientific objectivity and epistemic violence towards interlocutors in anthropology have faced ample critiques, applied methodological tools for *doing* otherwise still seem scarce. Supervision groups offer a collectively entangled alternative to disembodied, patriarchal, and ultimately violent notions of anthropological knowing. Based on a reflection of my participation in a supervision group for ethnographic fieldwork, I discuss how reciprocal vulnerabilities were addressed in ethically and epistemologically relevant ways in this context.

Keywords: *psychoanalysis, reflexivity, ethnography, experimental methods, psychological anthropology*

The Group Is More Than The Sum of Its Parts: Caring About Ethnographic Experiences

This article focuses on a psychoanalytically oriented fieldwork supervision group for ethnographers[1]—a tool for reflexivity that has mainly been practised and theorized in German-speaking anthropology thus far. Despite its relatively marginal position within academia, this collective, open-ended, and playful approach to analysis bears significant potential for all researchers committed to postcolonial feminist reflexivity. Acknowledging the multivocality inherent in ethnographic observation, such workshops create a resonating space for reflecting on fieldworkers' experiences during and after fieldwork. They thus address a gap in ethnographic work that, after years of concomitant theoretical advances, deserves consideration: how ethnographers can *methodologically* address the call for reflexivity that began resounding, amongst other reasons, due to attentiveness to epistemic injustice in various social contexts (Fricker 2007; Spivak 1988), the writing culture debate, and feminist and other epistemological critiques within anthropology (Behar 1996; Bhabha 1994; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Fabian 1983; Jaggar 1989).

[1] This account is based on my participation in the group-analytic supervision group for ethnographic fieldwork facilitated by J. Bonz in Germany. In the following, I will use the abbreviated term "supervision groups".

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In present-day ethnography, fundamental inconsistencies exist between self-reflexive research and the conventions of academic life (Bonz et al. 2017, 28). Although scholars share a consensus about the necessity of (preferably uninterrupted) reflexivity in the field, the "how"—developing enacted tools that embody radical, theoretically informed reflexivity—remains largely unaddressed (Bonz et al. 2017, 54ff). Supervision groups address the need to re-value emotions within (increasingly neoliberal) academia as ways of knowing and as political forces in doing research (Jaggar 1989; Askins and Blazek 2017; Levy 2016; Schild 2021; Berry et al. 2017). Breaking the silence around fieldwork's personal, vulnerable side requires that researchers care about their own emotions and those of others in the field and the latent, often inconvenient ways ethnographic insight unfolds.

While supervision groups have been theorized about, initiated, and practised in German-speaking anthropology from the 1960s on, they seem largely absent from contemporary academia (Winter and Brunner 2013, 419), potentially because practices that attend to the unconscious face questions of legitimacy in society (Erdheim 1991, 24).

I joined a supervision group for ethnographic fieldwork because neither academic anthropology as a discipline nor institutionalized academic research formats provided me with practical tools for addressing and epistemologically exploring the *experiential* dimensions of witnessing violence (e. g. structural and physical violence, self-harm) and trauma in the field. By joining a supervision group, my hopes were more than fulfilled. I encountered the first collective space within academia that questioned, in practice, the precarious notion of the ethnographer as a "singular creation standing alone in her or his artistic achievement" (Gottlieb 1995, 21, 22). Moreover, I encountered an exciting, challenging, transformative way of conceiving and conducting research.

Reflexive understanding never evolves in isolation. While interlocutors contribute to ethnographic reflexivity, myriad individuals—colleagues, friends, domestic partners, and others—contribute informally to ethnographic reflection behind the scenes of most research in an ever-present "oxymoronic zone of academic intimacy" (Gottlieb 1995, 21). Neither truly reflexive fieldwork nor caring responses to vulnerabilities in the field can flourish in isolation; they only will if we accept that the relations of thinking and knowing are ones which require care, thereby affecting *how* we care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 69).

With "reciprocal vulnerability", I refer to the multitude of emotional, often structurally determined (Zizzo et al. 2021, 152) and sometimes traumatic (Lester and Reyes-Foster 2019; Pollard 2009; Schild 2021) experiences of the researcher and the research participant in the field. Ethically responsive ethnography requires the "vulnerable participation" of the researcher and interlocutor (Zizzo et al. 2021, 152). In this vein, vulnerability does not equal passivity or pathology but is a prerequisite for collaborative research and alternative politics of social change and mutual care (Butler 2016; Zizzo et al. 2021) in the field and academia.

Supervision groups do not efface long-standing questions of epistemic violence (Teo 2010), objectification, and power in research but provide "felt" epistemological "double breaks" that address those questions (Pels 2014, 230). The multivocality within our fields is acknowledged as researchers practice "experiencing as knowing" *among themselves*. It has been a long-standing feminist claim that emotions should be integrated into knowledge prac-

tices—especially those "outlaw emotions" of the marginalized that signal the wrongs within hegemonic structures (Jaggar 1989, 166).

How exactly do we perceive, interpret, and disseminate the messiness, boredom, and irritations of our fields? Why do some research materials disappear into a "to-do" folder while others are analyzed instantly? Furthermore, why would any researcher make herself vulnerable by exposing her "black box" of messy research experience to other academics? It seems uncommon within academia to discuss research material and its emotional, subjective dimensions in a cohesive, collective fashion outside theoretical debates and textual critiques. I argue not against conventional academic formats of thinking and understanding but for creating more specific, confidential spaces, such as supervision groups that *care about* vulnerability and epistemology in the field. Such spaces require that researchers risk making themselves (and their epistemological authority) vulnerable within patriarchal academia—but they also offer considerable amounts of relief, community, and humour.

In the following, I describe my participation in a supervision group during and after fieldwork in psychiatric clinics in Switzerland in 2022, focusing on how institutional and personal attempts at enduring the uncanniness of disrupted experience had unconsciously influenced my ethnographic perception. Through collective reflexivity, I understood why some research notes from wards felt impermeable and confusing, rife with enumerative, impersonal, protocol-like language. I understood why I had captured encounters outside wards (i. e. at the park on clinical grounds) with much more phenomenological density. I will conclude by discussing how collective reflexivity enabled me to understand that *how* I perceived and analysed different clinical spaces was deeply influenced by how suffering was institutionally "formulated as an aesthetic object" (Good 1993, X)—and thus integrated or expelled from consciousness.

Psychoanalysis and (Counter)Transference in Anthropology

Following a historically estranged relationship between European anthropology and psychoanalysis, the questioning of the ideals of objectivity and detached observation led anthropologists to a renewed interest in psychoanalysis (Deluz and Heald 1994, 10) and work at the intersection of these fields (Corin 2007; Crapanzano 1992; Davies and Spencer 2010; Ewing 1987; Jackson 2010; Levy 2016; Lorimer 2010; Lundgaard Andersen 2012; Obeyesekere 1990; Robben 2020). More recently, there has been a renewed interest in transference and countertransference in qualitative research (Gemignani 2011; Holmes 2014; Lundgaard Andersen 2012; Meek 2003; Midgley 2006; Winter and Brunner 2013, 419). These concepts have been defined within clinical contexts as "a redirection or transfer of repressed or unacknowledged feelings, emotions, impulses, and desires from one object (person or event), most often, but not necessarily, from earliest childhood, to a contemporary object [...]" (Crapanzano 2019, 140–41). Others propose definitions of these concepts that are more appropriate for qualitative research, such as an "inchoate feeling–state response" (Cartwright 2004, 226) among researchers and interlocutors. Accordingly, strong emotions (i. e. excitement, anger, boredom, fear, shame, depression) in the field can be entry points into reflections on trans-

ference and countertransference (Bonz et al. 2017, 10; Hunt 1989, 61). In ethnography, these concepts diverge fundamentally from Freud's original use, as ethnographic encounters are non-therapeutic and concomitantly characterized by other interpersonal hierarchies (Crapanzano 2019, 143), whereby projective roles and positions between actors can be interchangeable (Gemignani 2011, 202).

Crucially, however, the potential of *applied* psychoanalytic methods in anthropology has remained unexplored and barely implemented so far (Gammeltoft and Segal 2016, 406). To work productively with countertransference, researchers must first resist the temptation to eliminate instantly all irritations and emotions that arise in the field through (mostly unconscious) defence mechanisms. Indeed, academia holds an array of "professional defences" that "decontaminate anxiety-arousing material by repressing or negating its affective content and human as well as personal relevance" (Devereux 1967, 83) or confirm biased preconceptions (Davies and Spencer 2010, 7).

Below, I outline the proceedings of the supervision group and illustrate them with vignettes from my participation.

The Supervision Group and How It Proceeds

The workshop group meets regularly during year-long cycles. Before the start of each cycle, new members are welcomed; membership otherwise remains closed. Group work is strictly confidential, which requires, among other priorities, a non-extractive stance towards others' research material and mutual abstinence in this regard. Each member decides if and to what extent their personal and emotional issues will be discussed, and the meeting venue is preferably outside the institutes where members work. Finally, there must be no close professional affiliation or hierarchical dependence between group members.

Supervision groups are chiefly epistemological tools and are not part of mental health services; however, they offer caring aspects that can significantly support well-being. For example, at the beginning and end of each meeting, a "free communication" period allows participants to voice their concerns as ethnographers. During those exchanges, the inseparability of the "professional" (doing ethnography) and the "personal" (e.g. work-life balance, job prospects, family, health) is addressed with openness and mutual attention, which I subsume as an act of care.

Over the course of one and a half days, the participants of these workshops immerse themselves in research material (fieldnotes, interview transcriptions) shared by four members before the meeting. The material is discussed in three phases. In Phase I (5–10 minutes), the author of the material contextualizes it and formulates the aim behind presenting it. Then, in Phase II (60 minutes)—the main phase—all group members spontaneously discuss the material without addressing the author directly. At this point, authors usually focus intently on listening, observing group dynamics, and taking notes; they may halt the discussion at any time, including when it feels too overwhelming. Finally, in Phase III (30 minutes), the author reacts to what has been discussed during the last hour, entering the conversation with the other group members. Clarifications, insights, and disagreements are voiced. As no final

"interpretation" beckons, individual members must decide which comments, if any, will be integrated into their analytical paths.

As immersion in others' research material provokes a collective exchange of associations, emotions, and images, this interpretive work proceeds radically differently from academic seminars and colloquia, each of which focuses on theoretical debates and textual critique. Researchers usually gain unexpected insights by exposing their research material to peers who are "strangers" within their field but committed to a caring, non-extractive attitude. The spontaneous, associative, and often contradictory reactions from others to one's research material can thus be experienced as a (productive) "offence", as interpretations beyond one's conscious acknowledgement and epistemic authority arise (Bonz 2017, 220–21). Researchers' perceptions of their material are thus temporarily shifted away from the version of the self that gave rise to the field notes (Bonz 2017, 13, 221).

In addition to processes of transference and countertransference in the field, participant emotions and reactions in supervision groups can be interpreted as countertransferences induced by the material, as both responses can be harnessed for a deeper understanding of said material (Bonz et al. 2017, 42). In these workshops, countertransference might manifest as condensation (mental images), displacement, ambiguity, or resistance (Bonz et al. 2017, 42; Erdheim 1991; Lundgaard Andersen 2012, 6).

Another source of knowledge is *how* the research material is presented: narrative arcs or breaks, vocabulary and writing styles, and even the material's organization into specific titles. Highlighting the informative power of textual flow within ethnographic material, Winter and Brunner (2013, 448) note that in addition to manifesting as ambiguity in the imagery of the text, the effect of the unconscious arises "as a destruction of language: as abrupt changes of subject, slips, gaps, and verbal unsoundness...[providing] a particularly productive access to the latent meaning of a text". Lorimer (2010, 101) describes how excessive, abstracting note-taking can serve as a defence strategy. Researchers can benefit more by becoming attuned to their emotions and associations during and after fieldwork rather than retreating into excessive description.

During their first sessions, new group members unaccustomed to working psychoanalytically and collectively with ethnographic research material can be as irritated as they are fascinated by this unfamiliar mode of academic collaboration. Over time, they become attuned to the emotional and associative echoes of others' material and learn to work with them as epistemological tools that are otherwise mostly subdued within academia (Becker et al. 2013, 194–95).

The vignettes below reflect my ongoing participation in a supervision group (starting in 2022) during fieldwork in psychiatric clinics in Switzerland. They are illustrative of the "productive offence" that arises when displaced aspects and emotions from the field (encompassing researchers and interlocutors) are picked up and amplified by the group during interpretative sessions—in this case, the uncanniness from witnessing lingering moments of dehumanization (self-induced, epistemic, and institutional violence) in institutions of caregiving. Violence and healing coexisted disquietingly within narratives depicting "the clinic" as a space of "protection", medical authority, and care. The interpretive session unveiled the latent content of my material, underscoring the paradoxical entwinement of a hopeful,

almost buoyant atmosphere with an uneasy sense of something important being silenced within a perceptual void. There, helplessness and overwhelm were present as "outlaw emotions"—those felt by interlocutors and myself that exceeded the bounds of conventional and institutional acceptability (Jaggar 1989, 166). A number of these reflected some interlocutors' experiences that encounters that were officially figured as "caring" felt violent; however, the primary reflection was of my own vulnerability, which was created by intimately witnessing violence, institutional failure, and self-harm without a chance to intervene and amplified by academia's lack of formats for addressing vulnerable experiences.

The supervision group profoundly supported the integration of the subdued and unbearable into the scope of my ethnographic reflection. Although this mode of understanding is best understood through direct practice, the vignette below hopefully captures what fascinates me about psychoanalytically oriented supervision groups: *They allow ethnographers to gain intimacy with their research field(s) (and those of others) by playfully questioning existing perceptions.*

A Vignette From the Supervision Group for Ethnographic Fieldwork

Below, I cite excerpts from the material I offered for discussion during various interpretive sessions.[2] The research material is in italics.

Interview with service user B in the park

(...) Service user B and I arrive on a park bench after a long interview. A gentle autumn morning. Below us are the lawn's patches of grass, and in front of us is the pond from which reeds sprout. A huge artistic object made from welded iron marks the corner of the park, together with a pergola overgrown by vines. Monotonously, some music therapy attendants play the didgeridoo underneath the vines. B bypassed the group hurriedly as we passed by some minutes ago. "That must be too loud for your recording device, isn't it?" The whole setting strikes me as surreal (...) there we sit now: he in his flip-flops and trainers, his thin, pale legs covered with knee-high socks. No more questions come to my mind, and B remains silent. I say, "Thank you for the conversation; I am happy having talked to you." He responds, "Me too! Finally, I went outside again; that doesn't happen very often." I ask, "So you would like to go outside more often?" He looks directly at me, saying, "I always need accompaniment; otherwise, I am not allowed outside because I have attempted suicide recently and haven't fully stopped contemplating it. Didn't you know that? You are my guard now." He grins broadly and stretches his legs out, seeming almost cheerful. For a second, I'm speechless. The nurse only told me to "take him for a walk" without giving any more information. As yet, I have no access to the clinical software where service users' histories are documented. I continue: "This role as a guard feels strange—after all, I am an ethnographer... Are you not outside more often because the nurses don't have time to accompany you?" He [says,] "Yes,

[2] Translated from German into English.

exactly. When only two nurses are on duty, going for a walk is not an option. But not leaving the station for several days is no big deal—with me, it doesn't matter anymore" (...). Overwhelmed by an uncanny feeling, I again struggle for words and reply honestly, though I worry about the accuracy of my words: "Thank you for sharing that. If you want, we can stay a bit longer outside (...) so you can enjoy the time outside to the fullest."

Notes from the ward: head psychiatrist's visit

Thursday morning. (...) We are waiting for the head psychiatrist in a crowded office; the interns [are] busy reading patient histories. An assistant doctor hands me a white coat. [At first,] I refuse to wear it, but she insists (...). The head psychiatrist arrives [and] we start our "round", which will last two hours. The number of staff members and interns accompanying the visit has grown to ten—and now to eleven, including myself. I feel deeply uncomfortable [as a contributor] to the [mass of] observers that cluster around service users' beds during their conversations with the psychiatrists. The conversations between the head psychiatrist and the service users centre largely around "balancing" moods and medication. They each last around five to ten minutes and leave me with the uneasy sense of having witnessed a vulnerable interaction that seems both intensely intimate and irritatingly mechanistic.

Interview transcripts

This contribution consists of transcripts and notes from interviews with dance, art, and movement therapists. Many such staff members circulated within the clinic but had their main therapy rooms outside wards in separate buildings. I found the spaces of every clinic I visited to exert an irresistible attraction on me, and I spent as much time as possible there.

In light of the research assignment (configurations of care and constraints in the clinic) my employer had assigned me, I thought this part of the material was trivial. Most of the interviews seemed to consist of mutually reinforcing methodological statements about non-medical therapeutic methods, occasionally accompanied by critical remarks about their marginalization within the medical hierarchies of the clinic.

The Discussion of My Material

Below, I describe how we worked with the material in the supervision group.

Eight ethnographers (five PhD students; others in various stages of postdoctoral research) and a moderator are seated in a circle supplied with cookies and tea. I sit with a pencil and a notebook on my lap while the other group members hold copies of the ethnographic research material I had shared before our meeting. As always, the only assignment before our meeting was to read all mate-

rials in a state of "free-floating attention" (Müller 2017, 166). *Three other group members will also present their material during this session, which lasts one and a half days. We start our session, and I briefly contextualize my ethnographic material and formulate my aims for this session: orienting myself within piles of repetitive field notes (which resist analysis and induce a strange sense of boredom in me) and becoming attuned to the phenomenology of space and time within the clinic. The material I put up for discussion includes an interview in the clinic park with a service user, notes from a group therapy session of Nordic walking in the nearby forest, interviews with art and movement therapists, and field notes from the in-patient ward.*

The hour-long interpretive session starts. Group members discuss, in an associative manner and without formal guidance, what specific thoughts, emotions, and associations my material provokes in them. I observe and note the communicative dynamics, topics, and emotions that unfold within the group. My material touches on the private lives of three persons present: one has a relative who works in a clinic; one is in training as a psychotherapist; a third states that she is a survivor herself and stresses what "intense" places wards can be while not commenting further on that aspect. I'm nervous. What if she perceives my descriptions as hurtful, triggering, or misrepresentative? Extremes in opinions and affective responses mark the atmosphere amongst discussants. Several members remark that my descriptions of the encounter with the service user in the park were enjoyable to read, ascribing to it a vivid, "almost poetic", and sometimes ironic style evocative of the sensory and affective dimensions of our walking interview and the surroundings. Among some participants, euphoria and a feeling of "wanting to read more like that" arises. After this initial buoyancy, however, an irritated discussant questions the bright mood within the plenum. She perceives my poetically verbalized encounter as disturbing; the service user had attempted suicide shortly before the interview and suffered from severe anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Beyond the contradiction between aesthetic form and troubling content, she feels irritated by the distanced and enumerative style of the other portion of my field notes: the descriptions of events within the ward. She remarks that this selection of field notes overlooks the difficult side of that institution, which is that a significant number of service users experience violence and coercive measures. By meandering through the literary aesthetics of the park, my writing concealed that the psychiatric ward, after all, is a troubled space. Others agree, and the atmosphere suddenly changes from lightheartedness to growing uneasiness. Several members find it hard to follow my sober and sterile accounts about the myriad events within the ward, as they can hardly picture the spaces and atmospheres—not to mention the personal experiences of service users and staff involved—due to my protocol-like writing style. Ultimately, a sense predominates in the group that there is a blind spot in my feelings and thoughts as a researcher regarding day-to-day life in the ward. The group moderator closes with the observation that the material and the dynamics during the previous hour of discussion leave the group with a feeling that something important remains unsaid.

In a session when my seemingly "trivial" material gathered from art and movement therapy departments is discussed, a long-standing group member has remained unusually silent and rises to speak only towards the session's end. She describes a feeling of intense physical and emotional discomfort without having an apparent reason for it; moreover, she reports feeling a sense of dread and invisibility within the group dynamic that manifests as an inability to enter the conversation during large parts of the group discussion. She describes having had the bodily sensations of sweating and the urge to physically leave the room. I feel uncomfortable as I am confronted with such

a strong countertransference to my material—but in far greater measure, this verbalization of the latent brings considerable relief and clarity. A central but displaced feeling within my field that characterized the experiences of the interlocutors and myself—the experience of not feeling seen in times of overwhelm—has been named.

During the final phase of the session, I share my thoughts and feelings. I feel simultaneously relieved and exhausted after the session.

The vignettes demonstrate how I understood that my ethnographic perception had been influenced by institutional and personal ways of handling (or not handling) trouble. It explained why parts of my material resisted understanding: I had yet to find words for the uncanny ways the psychiatric clinic—and ultimately, academia—sometimes fails to provide a "safety net" for those in urgent need. When ethnographers understand their entanglement within institutional and interpersonal processes of (in)visibilization and transference, reciprocal vulnerabilities become communicable and can be critically reflected on.

In the following, I take insights gained in the supervision group as a starting point to question the trope of the researcher as an isolated entity. I argue for a conceptual expansion of epistemological authority towards a fluid, entangled collectivity from which individuality emerges and recedes in constant flux (Mol, Moser, and Pols 2010, 10).

Insight I: Emotions as Knowledge About Vulnerable Experiences

The responses from group members in reaction to my material indicate a core aspect of the field: the struggles against—or co-creation of—the impending invisibilization of vulnerable experiences. The clinic officially adopted its function as a site of caretaking in times of existential need, but paradoxically, many interlocutors (service users and staff members) complained that they did "not feel seen" by others or the "institution". Interactions that are figured as "caring" within institutional discourses could easily be perceived as violent by service users—especially coercive measures. I met sufferers who did not receive psychotherapy, only heavy psychotropic medication. Some staff members became targets of physical and emotional violence and, due to dramatic shortages of staff, were severely overworked. On a weekday morning, I accompanied a doctor to an urgent meeting in a closed ward. A sufferer had died during the night, and the doctors speculated that the nurses could have prevented it. Highly agitated, the senior nurse from the ward retorts, "What do you expect under those inhumane working conditions? We are humans as well; we can't deliver what the institution demands from us anymore."

Witnessing such instances as an ethnographer sparked vulnerability within me, even though I do not inhabit a racialized, neurodiverse, or gender-nonconforming body in the field, any of which would have compounded it (see also Berry et al. 2017). I felt overwhelmed by witnessing how suffering, hope, violence, and helplessness paradoxically coexisted in many clinics. As I possessed one of the scarcest resources—time to listen and observe—sufferers and staff members repeatedly offered narratives of "telling how one really feels" in confidential interviews. However, my position was not that of a decision-maker or a therapist, which challenged me in one-to-one encounters with those compulsorily hospitalized or

suffering from acute suicidality and psychosis. The work environment that employed me to conduct this research did not offer any formats for dealing *emotionally* with the violence and vulnerabilities I witnessed, experienced, and co-produced as an ethnographer.

Sanitizing the scope of ethnographic "work" from diversely experienced vulnerabilities divorces the "values of the heart" from the "values of the mind" within academia (see also Mahmood 2008); this separation creates ethical and epistemological harm. Values of the heart involve caring about complex reciprocal vulnerabilities in collaborative, intersubjective research by taking seriously the asymmetries, dissents, and irritations that inevitably accompany anthropology (Pels 2014, 230 referring to Mosse). It is an epistemological necessity for ethnographers that intersubjectivity in the field undergoes a reflexive "series of asymmetrical breaks" (Pels 2014, 229–30), which I argue must include its latent dimensions.

Insight II: The Unconscious Dimensions of Institutions

My second observation concerns the power of the unconscious within institutions in their daily functioning and ethnographies about them.

In my field, clinical discourses and practices offer a common language for articulating affliction and healing (Lester 2007, 381) and provide structure for those who suffer "extraordinary conditions" (Jenkins 2015, 259). Paradoxically, however, clinical systematization often contradicts the *experience* of psychiatric suffering, which may be unbearable, unfathomable, and incommunicable to others, regardless of whether they share the affliction (Jenkins 2015, 261).

From the perspective of institutional ethnography, my ethnographic material's latent aspects reflected clinical "ruling relations" (Smith 2005, 10): forces that are often—but not exclusively—textually mediated and connect across space and time by organizing the daily lives of all involved. In her feminist (auto-)ethnographic reflection, Smith (2005, 13) approaches institutional power from sensorial and embodied lived experience, where becoming attentive to one's emotions and the unconscious means to practice "embodiment on the terrain of the disembodied" within institutional structures.

Mario Erdheim (1991) conceptualizes the unconscious as a force that is shaped by socio-historical processes and stabilizes societal power relations. He regards the social production of unconsciousness as operating most powerfully within institutions like schools, prisons, churches, political organizations, and—crucially—the academic discipline of social anthropology (Erdheim and Nadig 1983, 132; Erdheim 2010). Moreover, Lundgaard Andersen (2012, 7 referring to Wellendorf) adapts psychoanalytic terms to fit institutional research contexts such that "institutional transference" encompasses all attitudes, projections, and associations the institution and its actors hold towards researchers and "institutional countertransference" denotes the emotional, embodied reactions of the researcher to those projections and positionalities.

My ethnographic perception within the clinic had been subtly but fundamentally directed—in Devereux's (1967) terms, "distorted"—by institutional ways of (not) addressing excesses of trouble and vulnerability. The ward's ritualized gestures of care thus poten-

tially figured as acts of caretaking *and* ways of repressing the disquieting helplessness in a medical system that occasionally failed to respond adequately to vulnerability—as reflected in my excessive, mostly enumerative field notes, almost devoid of experiential and emotional dimensions. Academic silences around reciprocal vulnerability somewhat eliminated the anxiety provoked (Devereux 1967) by the uneasy fact that the ideal of rational "observation" and political stewardship took a toll on me as a researcher.

I have thus outlined 1) the ethical necessity of considering the unconscious within institutional ethnographies to address larger power structures and discourses that circulate within the field. These structures co-produce manifestations on unconscious or semi-conscious levels for all actors involved, including researchers. 2) Additionally, I addressed diverse forms of violence and vulnerability that are created by the invisibility of the experiences of interlocutors and ethnographers within institutional paradigms inside and beyond academia (see also Schild 2021; Teo 2010).

Limitations and Open Questions

I concur with Pels (2014), who argues that even "after objectivity", anthropology cannot shed its historical rootedness within objectivist ideals. While no universal answer solves the objectivity problem in ethnography, retreating to the "romance of harmonious collaboration" (Pels 2014, 230) will never be a satisfying solution. From another perspective, Bourdieu (1993) has argued for a "non-narcissistic reflexivity" within academia, in which "(...) scientific reason cannot be given its full force unless the 'psychoanalysis of the scientific mind' is taken further by an analysis of the social conditions in which sociological works are produced (...)" (Bourdieu et al. 1991, 3). This critique continues to inspire present-day ethnographic supervision groups that question the motivations behind the researcher's actions, including the habituated situatedness of researchers (Ribeiro and Miraldi 2022, 121). Bourdieu's "psychoanalysis of the scientific mind" resonates with the working gaps that supervision groups address within anthropology. Yet we must ask whether habituated epistemic injustice can ever be overcome within academia, especially when interlocutors are not part of research clusters. Cherishing an "unromantic" view of intersubjectivity within supervision groups may not be a solution but merely one step towards becoming capable of holding the field's complexity. Meanwhile, we must resist viewing reflexivity as "something that goes without saying", as it ceases to be a living inquiry when it becomes just another box to check off (Ribeiro and Miraldi 2022, 114).

Moreover, borrowing psychoanalytic tools in ethnography presents its own challenges (see also Gammeltoft and Segal 2016, 405). Historically, psychoanalytic thinking has reproduced naturalizations of social phenomena alongside culturalist and gendered universalisms that mask the multivocality of individual experience (Winter and Brunner 2013, 420). As struggles for orientation in an unfamiliar setting accompany ethnographic positionality, emotional responses in the field can also mislead (Davies and Spencer 2010, introduction; Lorimer 2010, 100). Countertransference as a reflexive tool should not be used as a gateway to detached objectivity but as a means for exploring the multidimensionality of emotional

resonances in the field (Lorimer 2010, 100). Researchers can modestly harness the latent irritations of human encounters (Bonz et al. 2017, 28; Hollway and Jefferson 2000, 47) as inspiration for new epistemological pathways.

The silence around reciprocal vulnerability in the field has only recently been addressed in the wake of discussions about the researcher's (mental) well-being (www.fieldworkinitiative.org) and violence during fieldwork (Fletcher et al. 2022; Lester and Reyes-Foster 2019; Mahmood 2008; Schild 2021; Berry et al. 2017). As such, many questions remain to be addressed regarding supervision groups. For example, how can an intersectional group of members be encouraged in the vein of "fugitive anthropology" (Berry et al. 2017)? Likewise, what are the interconnections and differences between psychoanalytically informed group work and other forms of reflexivity in social anthropology?

Conclusion: Reflexivity as a Vulnerable, Intersubjective Practice

If anthropology seeks to address (epistemic) violence and reciprocal vulnerability in the field through methodology, the researcher's emotions and experiences must be integrated into epistemological practices. In this work, I have discussed how intersubjective and larger institutional and societal dynamics create multiple, often displaced vulnerabilities in the field. Beyond being an ethical necessity for various parties, caring about reciprocal vulnerability opens up unparalleled ways of understanding the field. Such insights cannot be achieved by isolated, intellectual reasoning alone. Only through the collective reflexivity of the researcher's lived experience in the field—which already renders one vulnerable in academia—are they attainable.

The intersubjective and institutional dynamics within our fields, including their unconscious dimensions, can be addressed experientially within psychoanalytically informed supervision groups for ethnographic fieldwork. Such formats innovate on method insofar as they invite the researcher's attunement to fieldwork's unconscious, vulnerable dimensions—not in isolation but via *collective,* associative work. Such "vulnerable" work is only possible within protected, intentionally created spaces that embody a feminist ethics of care within academia. I close these reflections by calling for more practical engagement in this direction. Much experimentation remains, and many alliances require building to nurture further explorations of exciting, empowering values of the heart (Mahmood 2008) within academic research environments.

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WEAPONISED POSITIONALITY? COERCIVE DISCLOSURE IN THE "PUBLISH OR PERISH" ACADEMY

Sandhya Fuchs

Abstract

This paper brings anthropological scholarship on reflexivity and positionality in conversation with debates around issues of self-exploitation in the neoliberal university, to argue that the publication pressures early career anthropologists face, can cause them to feel that they must violate their own emotional and ethical boundaries to get their manuscript through peer review. Drawing on my own experience of being forced to disclose my past of traumatic violence to a journal, I show that reviewers' and editors' demands that anthropologists critically reflect on their positionality and on the power relations in their field site, can sometimes become weaponised against them. This can make academic publishing a site for new forms of violence, as well as for renewed trauma for young anthropological writers.

Keywords: *positionality, vulnerability, peer review, ethnographic authority, coercion, neoliberalism*

On a gloomy afternoon, an email pinged into my inbox. Reading the subject line, my heart skipped a beat: it was a decision from a prestigious anthropology journal, to which I had submitted an article some months prior. As a freshly minted PhD graduate, I had repeatedly been told that in the academic job market, you had to "publish or perish". And so, I opened the email with shaky hands. The decision itself was somewhat anticlimactic. The editors asked me to revise and resubmit the article for a second round of review. However, one reviewer's feedback caused my chest to tighten. "The author works with women from a marginalised community that she does not belong to. These women have experienced physical and sexual violence," the reviewer wrote, "I want to know what qualifies the author to write about these experiences. Do they have any first-hand knowledge of such violence that allows them to relate to these women on a personal level?". The journal editor had emphasised this comment in their letter. To make the paper of "publishable quality" the editor asked me to explain, which aspects of my own "positionality" allowed me to empathise with interlocutors, who had lived through sexual violence.

In one way, the invitation to reflect more deeply on the complex power dynamics at work in my fieldwork hardly came as a surprise. Operating at the intersection of anthropology and socio-legal studies, my PhD research had explored how Dalit (communities who were formerly considered 'untouchable' within the Indian caste hierarchy) survivors of caste-based violence—and especially Dalit women—sought justice through India's only hate crime law:

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the 1989 SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act (PoA). I had conducted almost two years of fieldwork with Dalit communities, police, and lawyers in the North Indian state of Rajasthan. In the article that I had submitted to the journal, I explained that even though I was a woman of European heritage, I had grown up in a remote North Indian village and spoke Hindi fluently. I had further related that the caste and gender-based power dynamics, which I had observed during childhood led me to work with a Delhi-based research institute that studied caste discrimination after university, and later to conceptualise my own research project on caste biases within the legal system. However, I knew that in this context my European background necessarily invoked difficult considerations around representation, privilege, and ethnographic authority.

Questions about the extent to which ethnographers from economically and socially privileged backgrounds can, or should be able to, write about the lives or legal experiences (Massoud 2022) of those who belong to marginalised groups, have been heatedly debated in anthropology (Robertson 2002; DeLuca and Maddox 2016). Such discussions have been especially complex and nuanced within the literature on caste. Thinkers from lower caste backgrounds have elucidated how upper caste intellectuals, many of whom have historically had intimate historical entanglements with the project of empire (Ayyathurai 2024), have monopolised Indian educational institutions and (re-)created lower-castes as essentialised and seemingly voiceless canvases of victimhood (Ingole 2020). Hence, some writers who identify as Dalit have warned of the potential pitfalls of higher caste and Western writers, claiming to represent the experiences of low caste communities (Guru 2012). Others have invited multi-directional and multi-scalar reflections on the forms of knowledge that fieldwork within, and across, caste and ethnic boundaries can produce (Raj 2022).

Therefore, the journal editor's request that I establish the scope of my ethnographic authority—or, in other words, that I discuss how my epistemological assumptions (Wellman 2006) moulded the narratives of caste and law, gender and marginality in my paper—, could be considered a sensitive response to these debates. However, what startled me was that the journal's feedback seemed to conflate positional reflection with a demand to prove and disclose my intimate history of injury. The reviewer's question whether I had "first-hand" experience of identity-based or sexual violence indicated two problematic assumptions: first, that to establish authority as an ethnographic writer, I had to have experienced the same modality of violence, as my interlocutors. Second, if I wanted the journal to publish my paper, I had to divulge personal, lived harms to substantiate said authority. Getting published—and, by extension, not perishing—was bound to having and sharing an injurious past. However, the request left me feeling profoundly vulnerable.

In this paper, I reflect on the ethical boundaries of encouraging positional disclosure in anthropological publishing. I do so by interrogating the modes of self-reflection, which are productive of critical ethnographic knowledge that decentres (historical) elite voices (Castaneda 2022), while considering the frontier between positional transparency and forced revelation. I inquire when the quest for positional reflexivity in anthropological publishing turns into, what I call, *coercive disclosure*: a process whereby authors feel compelled to expose parts of their lives that they might prefer to keep private to secure ethnographic credibility and academic currency.

I propose that when ethnographic credibility is singularly interpreted as experiential and epistemic equivalence (Pereira 2024)—the idea that ethnographers must be part of the same lifeworlds as their interlocutors to write alongside them—reviewers' quests to establish the authority of the writer can turn into an attempt to "fix the author more than what was written" (Arif 2021, 259). As the paper shows, this is not only the case when the ethnographer is considered a privileged outsider but also when they are perceived as an insider or "native" anthropologist (Arif 2021, 259). Hence, the pursuit of ethnographic authority through epistemic equivalence sometimes (un-)intentionally exacerbates a different power dynamic: that between the anthropological author, whose career relies on having their research featured in high-impact academic outlets, and the academic publishers, who act as gatekeepers to this goal. In the context of "publish or perish" culture, simplistic demands for epistemic equivalence can push especially junior anthropologists to conceal complex personal realities, or to engage in acts of intimate revelation that cross their ethical boundaries.

The journal's insistence that I speak about my "first-hand experience" to make the paper "publishable", combined with the anxieties of the post-PhD career stage, ultimately led me to share the fact that I, too, had once experienced sexual violence: I disclosed this fact to calm the reviewers concerns that I could not possibly understand my interlocutors' marginalised lives and hurts. However, as a result, the experience of revising and resubmitting the paper left me feeling exposed. I felt like I had exploited my vulnerabilities (Brienza 2016) and treated my own hurts as a transactional ethnographic resource (Collins and Gallinat 2010).

Here, I return to these feelings for three reasons. First, to reclaim the moment of coercive disclosure on my terms by writing *not* about the event of violence itself, but about the ways, in which I navigated my own framework of disclosure in the aftermath. Second, to highlight the harm careless peer review practices can do in a neoliberal university, which has told scholars that academic careers necessarily involve self-sacrifice. Third, to draw attention to the ethical concerns that can arise during peer review in an age when it is often easy for reviewers to deduce the identity of authors through internet searches (Ha 2021).

By exploring the implications of coercive disclosure in academic publishing, this paper brings together three theoretical strands of scholarship. First, methodological debates on reflexive anthropology (Asad 1994; Vanner 2015; Davis and Walsh 2020) that emphasise the relationship between epistemology and power (Mohanty 1988; Lazar 2005). Here I draw special attention to epistemological discussions within anti-caste scholarship (Guru 2012; Ingole 2020; Raj 2022; Ayyathurai 2024). Second, literature in social psychology, which has emphasised the counter-productive effects of forced, traumatic disclosure (Emmerik 2002; Kimbley et al. 2023), and third an emerging body of work, which highlights how the neo-liberalisation of academic institutions and values can engender processes of self-exploitation among scholars (Brienza 2016; Falcón and Philipose 2017).

In doing so, I, ultimately, propose that the current peer review process produces a form of *unilateral vulnerability*, which stands in direct opposition to the *reciprocal vulnerabilities* that often shape the fieldwork experience. Other authors in this issue sensitively showcase how the ethical entanglements and shared hurts, to which deeply immersive fieldwork gives rise, can engender relatedness between ethnographers and their interlocutors. This relatedness enables anthropologists and their research partners to build solidarities across differences in back-

ground and privilege. In contrast, peer review practice in an oversaturated, neo-liberalised academic marketplace is defined by a unilateral flow of authority. Journals can leverage their influence to push young authors to divulge their innermost lives to anonymous reviewers, whose own positionality and knowledge remain hidden and un-interrogated. Extending Chris Shore and Susan Wright's analysis of coercive accountability in university audit culture, I argue that such coercive disclosure aims to transform unruly ethnographic identities into tradable, global research commodities that boost impact factors (2000). While the reciprocal vulnerability of fieldwork is a source of connection, the unilateral vulnerability of coercive disclosure leaves the writer isolated.

Pitfalls of Positionality?

Ethnographic Authority in Anti-Caste Studies

The insight that there are no neutral ethnographic claims (Mohanty 1988) has become somewhat of a truism in anthropological knowledge production. Ethnographers have increasingly acknowledged that they cannot assert epistemic authority by simply referencing their immersion in a particular context (Clifford 1983). Instead, contemporary anthropological thinkers actively acknowledge that ethnographic insight is rooted in subjective visions (Asad 1994), which are shaped by complex power relations (Gonçalves and Fagundes 2013) that are often rooted in the legacy of colonialism (Vanner 2015). To avoid the (re-)production of colonial or neo-colonial power structures in anthropological research—especially when working with vulnerable communities¾contemporary ethnographic writers openly discuss how their own experiences and identities shape their fieldwork and analyses. Such positional transparency is now considered the mark of an ethical and credible ethnographic narrator, whose work won't do (interpretive) violence to their interlocutors (Anderson 2021).

Calls for ethnographers to openly reflect on the "vantage point" (Raj 2022, 132), from which their analysis emerged, have become especially pronounced in the arena of caste studies. Intellectuals from lower caste—and especially Dalit—backgrounds have pointed out that voices from their own communities have been conspicuously absent in most studies of caste (Guru 2012). They argued that in the Indian context higher-castes—and members of the Brahmin caste specifically—have historically held a monopoly on knowledge claims writ-large and actively circulated socially harmful narratives about lower caste communities (Ingole 2020). Gajendran Ayyathurai further argues that upper-caste knowledge projects did not stand on their own, but were deeply intertwined with, and reinforced by, Western missionary activity and the project of the British Empire. He proposes that theoretical work on the Indian social context has, thus, been heavily shaped by upper-caste and Western perspectives, which have produced knowledge about lower castes with the explicit interest of reinforcing Brahmin hegemony (Ayyathurai 2024).

As a reaction to, what some call, the Brahminical knowledge-power complex (Padmanabhan 2017), anti-caste scholars have sought to resist the top-down essentialisation of lower-caste experience by higher-caste and Western writers and have reclaimed their own land-

scape of fractured memory (Nagraj 2010). Social theorists from Dalit backgrounds like Gopal Guru have questioned whether experiences of Dalit exclusion should ever be narrated by writers who don't belong to Dalit communities (2012).

Within anthropology, one of the most nuanced, recent reflections on the relationship between ethnographic authority, caste, and the epistemology of caste oppression is presented by Jayaseelan Raj in his study of South Indian tea plantations (2022). Reflecting on his positionality as a "plantation boy" (xii) from a Dalit background, who conducted fieldwork in the very community in which he grew up, Raj carefully outlines how his positionality governed the interactions he traced on the plantation. He proposes that on the one hand, being trusted by the marginalised castes, turned him into "a person who holds the secrets of plantation life" (xiii). On the other hand, he also details how his identity as a Dalit engendered fraught interaction with plantation management, who reduced him to his caste status and treated him with "condescension" (xvi). Raj concludes that reflexive anthropology must go beyond perfunctory reflections on the privilege of the typical Western anthropological researcher. Highlighting that his fieldwork made him ever more aware of his vantage point as a "plantation boy" he encourages anthropologists to engage more deeply with the ways their personal stories shape the conditions of their subjectivity as ethnographers, and how this subjectivity influences the ethnographic text (xvi).

Similarly, ethnographic researchers from higher caste backgrounds who have tried to sensitively engage with Dalit lifeworlds, have encouraged anthropologists to consider the reciprocal relationship between the systemic conditions of ethnographic knowledge production, and their positionalities. In her book *Semiotics of Rape: Sexual Subjectivity and Violation in Rural India* Rupal Oza (2022) highlights how her identity as a dominant-caste woman, as well as deep-seated structures of caste oppression in her field site, determined which cases of rape were revealed to her during fieldwork. While incidents of rape within upper-caste circles were systematically hidden from her, stories of lower-caste families were considered "available" for study (31).

Together, these examples expose the centrality of positional considerations within the context of anthropological knowledge production on caste, gender, and law. Caste identity or perceived caste and ethnic identities govern what and who ethnographers can find, think, and write about. Hence, the question of who can speak about caste, and how, must be continuously negotiated.

Essentialised Positionalities?

However, not all requests for positional reflection within the anthropological marketplace have been as nuanced or ethically productive. Sometimes, simplistic professional requests for positional disclosure have also created new pitfalls (Robertson 2002). Chief among them has been a tendency to essentialise identity categories in the name of reflexivity and require that fieldworkers portray themselves as fitting neatly into a globally tradable set of positional classifications.

Anthropologist Jennifer Robertson recalls the confusion and shame she felt when a reviewer for her book, which focused on questions of sexuality and politics among Japanese women,

aggressively criticised her for not positioning herself as an "academic, white, Westerner woman" (2002, 789). Robertson struggled with this categorisation because the description the reviewer demanded effaced the complex ways, in which her own life, as well as her family's past, was bound to Japan. She felt that the ways, in which she was similar, or relationally bound to, her interlocutors were entirely obscured by the reviewer's comment.

Drawing on her experience Robertson warns that in academic publishing, the pursuit of positional reflexivity has often been largely reduced to a simplified disclaimer at the start of ethnographic accounts. The authors must announce that they are "writing as [name, category]" (Robertson 2002, 788) to satisfy readers and reviewers, who equate positionality with essentialised, and often visible, markers of race, gender, or age. Yet, these categories can sometimes obscure the nuances that define an ethnographer's unique vantage point and can cause intellectual and personal harm. First, the attempt to reduce the complexities of power involved in fieldwork, as well as ethnographers' own multifaceted life stories, to a simple exercise of "writing as [name, category]", runs directly counter to what anthropology claims as its central contribution to the social sciences: namely to highlight the fluidity of cultural, political, and social categories (Vanner 2015). Second it creates a new mode of violent categorisation by demanding self-essentialisation on the part of the anthropologist: every ethnographer must declare themselves a particular "[name, category]", a process that, ironically, renders ethnographers' unique relationalities in the field illegible.

As Yasmeen Arif argues, requests that anthropologists essentialise themselves by mobilising what she calls "root-identities"—for example, ethnicity or religious heritage—to frame their work and prove themselves credible narrators, can promote new modes of epistemic inequality. In an article entitled "The reluctant native" Arif recounts how in response to her fieldwork in Beirut, journal reviewers seemed overly focused on fixing her role as a "postcolonial *qua* native anthropologist" (2021, 260). While one reviewer consistently mentioned her identity as an "Indian female", another seemed to advocate that as a Muslim writer she should pay more attention to Islamic histories (259). Arif proposes that careless demands to "fix" an author's identity can create novel forms of epistemic violence that entirely contradict the goal of letting "native" anthropologists speak.

Arif's account crucially highlights that the essentialised positional reflection that is often promoted in the peer review process, scholastically and personally harms ethnographers from all vantage points. Asking an ethnographer to self-essentialise their identity as a "native" anthropologist can be as injurious as demands for an "outsider-ethnographer" to prove a simplistic form of experiential and epistemic sameness.

Concealment

Such essentialising requests can push anthropologists towards practices of involuntary concealment or exposure. To render the nuances of their background legible in their writing, and to prove that their research critically navigated differentials of vulnerability and privilege, anthropologists can feel like they are reduced to two options: either, they must hide aspects of their identity, which fail to conform to positional categories that have scholarly currency, or

they feel compelled to explicitly detail intimate aspects of their life to show that their perspective is more layered than their belonging in "identity category x" suggests.

Anthropologist Katarina Daily Thompson analyses the first one of these processes—the positional quest for concealment. She recounts that as an ethnographer of Zanzibar and the wife of a Swahili, Zanzibari man, she was expected to "become" a Swahili woman after marriage (2019, 674). Occupying both insider and outsider status, Thompson reports how she underwent a process of progressive self-essentialisation, in which she grew increasingly uncomfortable with the so-called Western aspects of her identity and tried to fully turn herself into a normative, imagined version of a Swahili woman (2019, 681). While this was partially inspired by the demands placed on her by her martial family, her desire to turn herself "deep-[ly]" Swahili (2019, 681) was also the result of positional anxiety: the broader culture of, what Robertson calls, "writing as [name, category]", caused Thompson to feel that her ethnographic research was more valuable and ethical the more completely she fit an essentialist category of the Swahili woman.

This conviction led her to accept and hide the physical violence she was subjected to by her husband. She felt that exposing the fact that he broke her fingers or threw things at her would reinforce Western biases against men from the African continent and reinscribe a colonial practice of cultural judgement.

By engaging in strategic concealment, Thompson exposed herself to physical injury to perform a positionality that would make her a good wife and a convincing ethnographic narrator. In the process, she took an ethnographically extractive approach to her own "self" (Collins and Gallinat 2010).

Coercive Disclosure

Silence as Acceptance

At this juncture, I want to return to my own story, which I teased at the start of this paper. If Thomson talks about the violence of concealment, my own experience tells the opposite tale. To be regarded as an ethical and authoritative ethnographic writer by the community of professional anthropologists who acted as reviewers and editors for my article, I ended up disclosing aspects of my past that I had, thus far, only shared with my closest confidantes: my own experience of sexual violence.

From a career standpoint, this decision was a good one. It led reviewers to view me as a credible narrator of brutality, who had in some ways "experienced similar forms of power as [my] interlocutors" (Reviewer, anonymous journal, second round of reviews). However, from an intimate and personal standpoint, this decision left me feeling profoundly disempowered and ashamed.

Some anthropologists have unlocked both personal empowerment and new avenues of knowledge production by analysing their own experience of violence in anthropological publications (Schneider 2023). Such work powerfully speaks to the cathartic power of expression and the emergence of a new voice after injury (Das 2007).

However, my relationship with my past had always been characterised by the opposite dynamic. After being assaulted at the age of 21, speaking about the event never really helped. For the longest time, and in part till this day, any urge I have ever felt to tell someone about the details of that evening was rooted in a sense of lack. I saw myself as a person, whose fatal flaw lay hidden under an exterior of joy and stability. Hence, talking about the attack always felt like an apology for my defects.

When I met the man, who is now my husband, I told him exactly what had happened because I thought that not divulging all the details would be like keeping a dark secret. But he did not see it that way. He always made it clear that I did not owe him a story I did not feel like telling. And so, as I grew more confident in myself and our relationship, the desire to disclose waned. I felt a sense of calm in knowing the explanation or apology I thought I had to provide, didn't need to be given. If I wanted to be silent I could. I did not owe anyone disclosure.

To avoid any confusion, I want to emphasise that I do not think that events and experiences of sexual violence—or any mode of violence—should be kept quiet if their owners want to share them. Finding words to communicate a difficult past to others is a good and necessary step. Personally, I occasionally confided in friends and family. When the stories of violence against women that I encountered during fieldwork brought back intrusive thoughts, I went into therapy. In the hands of a capable trauma therapist, I unpacked my feelings of self-blame and learned a new vocabulary of experience, which allowed me to reframe the past. These acts of expression were incredibly valuable. However, their positive impact was inextricably linked to the fact that they were acts of *voluntary* disclosure. Speaking and sharing was a choice.

Toxic Equivalence

This changed on that gloomy day in 2022 when the journal's email popped into my inbox. One of the cases I discussed in the paper concerned a young Dalit woman who had been raped by five upper-caste boys in her village. I had tried to carefully delineate how I had formed a relationship with the girl, from which vantage point my analysis of the case had emerged, and focused the article primarily on the ways, in which legal institutions and actors transformed and mobilised her story.

I reflected that at the time of fieldwork, I had been a young woman in her twenties whose appearance easily betrayed her Western heritage. Yet, the fact that I had spent my childhood in rural areas of North India also meant I was intimately familiar with the way kinship, gender, and caste systems operated on the ground. I spoke Hindi, to quote a Dalit women's activist in Rajasthan, "like one of our village girls". This somewhat bizarre combination of identities meant that legal actors from higher caste backgrounds were often very open with me about their own caste biases. At the same time, it also allowed me to live with a Dalit family in one of Rajasthan's villages for over a year and to see how caste oppression operated on the ground.

I thus proposed that my contribution to the field of caste studies lay in my ability to trace how caste prejudice is reproduced at different institutional levels within the Indian legal system. The aim of my work was not to represent caste violence as a category of experience, but

to leverage my ambiguous positionality to show how caste and patriarchal injuries are often intentionally obscured in Indian law.

Concerning the particular story of sexual violence that the paper discussed, I mentioned that I came to know the young survivor over many months. I also mentioned that I had told the girl personal details about my own life to create a more equal playing field of intimate exchange. However, I did not share with the journal what these intimate details were.

Yet, what I had considered an attempt at careful positional framing, did not satisfy one reviewer. To remind the reader of what I recounted at the start, the reviewer pointed out that I did not belong to the marginalised community with which I was working. Supported by the editor, they argued that I needed to prove that I had the right to write about the type of violence I was describing by disclosing whether I had ever lived through violence:

> *The author works with women from a marginalised community (...) who have experienced physical and sexual violence. I want to know what qualifies the author to write about these experiences. Do they have any first-hand knowledge of such violence that allows them to relate to these women on a personal level?* (Anonymous peer reviewer)

Here, I wish to reiterate that I don't believe that the reviewer's insistence that I engage even more deeply with the dynamics of power involved in my research was itself problematic. As ethnographers an unwillingness to continuously interrogate power differentials can make us deeply complicit in structural (Davis and Walsh 2020) and gendered violence (Mulla 2014).

Yet, the reviewer didn't ask me to provide more nuanced reflections on the implications of a non-Dalit woman speaking about Dalit women's lives. Instead, they demanded to know about my own "first-hand knowledge" of sexual violence. Though I never got an explanation for the logic behind this request, I can only fathom that it was rooted in the assumption that identifying me as a survivor of violence would accomplish two things. First, it would highlight the psychological kinship between me and my interlocutors, which would render my project inherently "ethical": if I were a victim too then the power dynamics rooted in other aspects of my identity would be neutralised. Second, the similarities of my own lived experience would lend credence to my ethnographic interpretations.

As I set out to revise the article, I was tense. I avoided addressing the question about my "personal" experience till the very end. I knew exactly what information I could provide to satisfy the journal. I could tell them that I had indeed lived through sexual violence and that I had read every book on trauma I could get my hands on. But I was reluctant to reveal this information and, frankly, resentful that the question had been asked in the first place. I disagreed with the journal's premise that the *only* way to be ethnographically sensitive was to be experientially like the people I worked with. I also didn't think that my deepest hurts were theirs to extract.

When I could no longer avoid it, I spoke to a friend, who was also an early career scholar. She was understanding, but her approach was also pragmatic. "It's your story to tell", she said:

> *but this is a big journal and we all still really need to publish at this point in our careers. Just tell them the minimum and resubmit. You will kick yourself later if you mess up this publication and it hinders your career.*

Eventually, I followed suit. In my letter to the reviewers, I stated what events, and what subsequent feelings of trauma experientially qualified me to "speak about violence and traumatic injury". The editor and reviewers rejoiced: they congratulated me for my "deep level of reflexivity" (anonymous peer reviewer). They praised my candour and called it a "brave" act of positional analysis, which helped "situate" the ethnographic material (journal editor).

But the decision didn't feel empowering at all. It brought anxious thoughts and new shame. As much as previous silences had felt like acceptance, as much as sharing with my husband, friends, and family on my terms had been a step, which quieted voices of self-blame, this act of disclosure felt utterly different: it felt coercive. It felt like I had lost sight of the safe boundaries that I had drawn for myself over the past nine years in the pursuit of an academic career.

Later, I realised that these feelings were themselves indicative of a common psychological response. Research has shown that the pressure to disclose traumatic events can undo the supposed benefits of sharing stories of injury (Kimbley et al. 2023). Kimbley et al. argue that while

> *trauma disclosure has been associated with improved posttraumatic outcomes (...), external forces that impede trauma survivors' sense of control and empowerment over their trauma-related experiences—such as pressure from others to disclose—can lead to attenuated recovery.* (Kimbley et al. 2023, 567)

These findings resonate with earlier studies, which propose that practices like post-traumatic debriefing—"a formal type of post-traumatic care" (Emmerik 2002, 766) —, in which survivors are instructed to share their feelings in a supervised setting within a certain time frame, often have detrimental effects. Bypassing the voluntary and natural sharing progressions that allow survivors to come to terms with what has happened in their own time, leads to a renewed loss of agency for survivors, which can be re-traumatising (Emmerik 2002, 769–70). In my case, this perceived loss of agency also produced more self-blame for giving in to demands, which I should have resisted. I grappled with the sense that I had lost my integrity.

Publish or Perish

Early Career Anxieties

However, thus far the analysis still begs the question: Why did I feel coerced to disclose? Unlike survivors who were guided through sessions of posttraumatic debriefing, I could have refused to provide the information the journal had asked for. I could have argued vehemently with the editors that "first-hand-knowledge" of violence did not automatically make a credible ethnographic narrator, and at the most extreme end I could have simply decided not to publish the paper.

Yet, I did feel like I had little choice. I could not escape the acute anxiety that at this stage of my career, this one publication could make all the difference. My friend too had implied

that—until I became more established—the reviewers and journal editors had all the power to either open or close the gates to my academic future.

This fear did not come out of nowhere. It was the direct result of a phrase I had heard repeatedly throughout my PhD and postdoctoral journey: "publish or perish". When I attended my first workshop on academic publishing, the instructor started out by writing the phrase on the blackboard behind him. For the remaining two hours, I stared at the board, where the words loomed large in capital letters. "Publish or Perish", a senior professor told me at a conference: "At this stage in your career, publish in journals as much as possible, otherwise you will struggle in the job market."

These incidents were no aberration. "Publish or perish" was the phrase every well-meaning senior colleague shared when advising me on my future. These were often wonderful mentors with deeply honest intentions. But the words stuck somewhere in my brain, not as a motivational slogan, but as a glaring warning.

There were cautionary tales everywhere about early career scholars, who had gotten caught up in teaching and administration and forgotten to publish. These tales were coupled with a constant emphasis on the importance of publishing in the "right", high-ranking, journals. "Your PhD fieldwork is the best research you will ever produce"; another senior academic advised, "don't waste it, get it into the best, high-impact journals".

When I got reviews back on the very first manuscript I had ever submitted to a journal and disagreed with some of the theoretical claims of one of the reviewers, a mentor told me to be careful. "If you want the article accepted, you have to take on most of the criticism, especially at your stage," they warned. "You need to make reviewers feel that they have been heard." Moreover, they argued, I had to reassure the editors that the revised article fit their vision for the journal.

What I took away from this advice was that if I wanted to have a future in my desired profession, I should not argue with the anonymous experts who evaluated my work. Until I became established, I had to play the journal's game. When I brought up to senior scholars that this seemed like a somewhat unhealthy atmosphere, the answer was often a little dismissive. They too had to play the game at some point, so I had to play it now. Later I would reap the shiny reward of a permanent academic post. Then I would have freedom. But until then I had to deliver what was asked.

I don't share these details to make the scholars, who have kindly given their advice look bad. I have been extremely fortunate with my mentors. They have been encouraging, patient, and kind, and certainly not all of them adhered to the "publish or perish" mantra. Rather, I share this to elucidate the mental framework, within which I operated, when I agreed to disclose my own story: a framework, which treated the self as a resource of professional progress and normalised academic self-exploitation.

Neoliberal Self-Exploitation

The neo-liberalisation of the academy has resulted in new forms of "injury, stress, and hurt" (Falcón and Philipose 2017, 188) for scholars, and especially for people of colour, women, and

queer communities in universities. Falcón and Philipose define academic neo-liberalisation as the development of a corporate university culture, which systematically produces harm for faculty through "attacks on academic freedom, inhumane conditions for university employees, (...) *high pressure to frequently publish,* (...), [and] dismissals of faculty whose work challenges prevailing relations of power" (2017, 186, emphasis mine). They argue that these dynamics isolate academics from one another and perpetuate a culture where scholars are forced to view themselves as "hyper-producers of knowledge, who publish as much as possible even when they cannot afford to do so" (2017, 189).

Even though many have argued that the peer review process itself is deeply flawed and often fails to ensure that the most methodologically or theoretically sound papers are accepted (Smith 2006), the pressure to publish in peer-reviewed journals gives rise to practices of violent self-censorship among academics. Scholars learn to police their actions and to make choices that don't align with their desires and values. This is often detrimental to scholars' physical and mental health (Falcón and Philipose 2017, 189).

However, such academic violence is not merely a top-down endeavour. Instead, succeeding in the neoliberal university is contingent on scholars' willingness to "acquiescence to exploitation and further [their own] willingness to self-exploit" (Brienza 2016, 93). Chris Shore and Fiona Wright highlight this through their discussion of coercive accountability within university audit culture. They propose that academics are systematically trained to discipline and manage themselves into a product that promotes the university's ideas of efficiency (2000, 62). Researchers learn to shape themselves into carriers of institutional goals through acts of self-exploitation in the service of the labour, and the publications, that the academic marketplace demands.

Conclusion

Ultimately, my agency to disclose had been fundamentally shaped by the neoliberal value system I had been taught to believe in. I had internalised the notion that an academic career was bought through blood, sweat, tears, and a little of your own sanity. I had accepted that getting ahead in academia necessarily relied on preparedness to cross one's own psychological boundaries in exchange for publications and job prospects. Hence, the act of disclosure I engaged in was neither authentic nor voluntary, it was the result of a gradual process that made me compliant with self-extraction and almost completely accepting of publishers' discourses and demands around my work.

In a discipline like anthropology, which is inextricably linked to its colonial past, reflexive engagement with ethnographic positionality is a crucial tool to minimise (interpretive) violence towards interlocutors. However, my own experience suggests that, when identity categories and understandings of power are essentialised and wielded uncritically by gatekeeper publications in a pressure-packed academic market, demands for positional reflection can engender new modes of vulnerability.

One potentially harmful positional approach focuses *exclusively* on epistemic equivalence. The assumption that establishing ethnographic authority is only ever possible if ethnographers are experientially like their interlocutors can bring harm to "outsider" or "insider" ethnogra-

phers alike (Arif 2021): While the former are reduced to essentialised difference, the latter become over-determined by their "native" identity. In an era where journal publishing has become the *sine qua non* of academic advancement, demands by prestigious academic publications to prove sameness can make authors feel coerced to divulge deeply intimate experiences.[1]

These coercive disclosures ultimately produce a form of unilateral vulnerability for the anthropologist, which stands in stark contrast to the reciprocal vulnerabilities that mark the fieldwork experience. While the latter can be a source of solidarity between researcher and research partner, the latter deepens conditions of intellectual self-extraction and transgresses ethical boundaries of professional conduct.

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[1] I will not share whether the article I discuss here was eventually published.

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MIGRATION, REPRESENTATION, AND REFLEXIVITY

An Intergenerational Dialogue on Current Issues

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FOREWORD

Esther Leemann

Abstract

This foreword discusses the ongoing tradition of self-reflection and critique within anthropology, focusing on its impact on PhD students. It highlights how contemporary debates about representation, cultural performance, and decolonization challenge young scholars' research projects and professional identities. I note that while self-criticism has been a constant in anthropology since the 1960s, it poses unique challenges for new researchers who strive to meet high ethical standards and innovative research expectations simultaneously.

The foreword emphasizes the precarious position of PhD candidates, who must balance innovation with adherence to established schools of thought. Despite these challenges, I observe that current graduate students actively engage with disciplinary critiques, demonstrating thorough knowledge of original works and creating spaces for cross-disciplinary discussions. The foreword concludes by introducing a special issue featuring PhD candidates' reflections on representational issues in their research, illustrating the ongoing importance of self-reflection in anthropology.

Keywords: *self-reflection, representation, PhD students, disciplinary critique*

While working on their PhD theses, the editors of this SJSCA special issue grappled with the interrelated theoretical debates about representation, culture as performance, aesthetic decolonization and engaged anthropology. In doing so, they found that the questions arising from these debates destabilized not only their research projects, but also their identities as anthropologists-to-be, at a critical moment when they were trying to establish themselves in the scholarly community. "

Such struggles are not new. The recurring investigation of the discipline of anthropology itself started already in the sixties, when students lashed out in anger and frustration at their own field, which was most closely related to what later would be called "the Other" (Lewis 2014). Ever since, the "critique of anthropology" has been an important and omnipresent element in our teaching and practice of the discipline (Rosaldo and Lampere 1974). The ability and willingness for critical self-reflection is unbroken, as the AAA's annual meeting 2023 in November showed. One of the most current debates, often led by indigenous scholars, revolves around problematic methods of the discipline used over its history, such as anthropometric measurements and photographs, or the mass looting of graves for scientific purposes (Cox Hall 2023; Davis 2023; Dent 2023; Engel 2023; Heaney 2023; Kowal 2023; Supernant 2023a). Once again, the focus is on the difficult historical legacy and its significance for the development of the discipline and its identity, not least in the museums, which are asking themselves how they should deal with collections that were assembled by dubious means,

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and how the relationship with the societies of origin should be structured (Dent 2023; Engel 2023; Supernant 2023a, 2023b). These and other debates are very much alive and will continue to shape the discipline in the future. Criticisms of the critique of anthropology also recur (e.g. Lewis 1998), as does the reaction to it, e.g. that it undervalues the gains "from a long and diverse process of self-reflection and constructive criticism" (Toussaint 1999, 605) for the discipline.

I agree with Toussaint's assessment that we benefit from a continuous process of self-reflection, but I would nevertheless like to point out the specific challenges that the continuous critique of anthropology poses for young scholars. Firstly, as coordinator of the Swiss Graduate School of Anthropology at CUSO, I observe that the tradition of self-reflection is particularly unsettling for those who are just about to establish themselves in this unruly discipline. They are usually very concerned with making everything "right" when they go the field and then write a dissertation about it. The current generation of PhD students in Switzerland, on average, are trying to apply the best practices of collaboration and ethical concerns, to do engaged or public anthropology, to deconstruct the concepts they have been taught to work with so that they can avoid misrepresenting research participants or relationships or doing epistemic violence. This is quite a long list of concerns. In contrast, many established scholars had a shorter list of self-reflection on their own practice when they entered the discipline. Hence, they could incrementally adapt their practice with each new wave of self-criticism.

Secondly, I would like to draw attention to the fact that PhD students are in a rather precarious situation. The work of doctoral students must be innovative, must bring something new into the world, achieve something that has never been done before. By its very nature, this sets the work of PhD candidates critically apart from previous work—sometimes from the work of those reviewing the PhD candidates' research project proposals, articles and dissertation. In some cases, doctoral students may feel the urge to be recognizable as a student of a supervisor, represent a particular school of thought and help to strengthen that strand in the discipline. However, this in turn may be rejected in peer reviews—a somewhat misleading term as reviewers rarely are other PhD students but established scholars—or in doctoral committees, either because the ideas are still very new (in the case of young supervisors) or because they are outdated (in the case of very experienced supervisors). And one of the most difficult positions is when PhD researchers go against the school of thought represented by their primary supervisor. To satisfy all sides is not always an easy task for the doctoral candidates.

As exhausting and unsettling as it is for the PhD candidates to establish themselves in the discipline, my experience with today's graduate students tells me that rather than avoiding the investigation of our discipline, they want to tackle it head on. In doing so, they do not simply reproduce the tradition of writing against anthropology without having read the criticized original works (as some critics against "critical theory" and "postcolonial" writers complained (Lewis 2014; 1998)), they are knowledgeable of the criticized original works and form well-founded stances in the debates. Also, the current generation of anthropologists in training looks for and—if there are none—creates spaces where they can discuss theoretical positions across subdisciplines and regional fields. Among others, they use the opportunity

granted by the CUSO Swiss Graduate Program in Anthropology for student organized workshops.

This was the case with the editors of this special feature who created what they call a "safe space", "... where graduate students could experiment, ask questions, and share experiences in an open, receptive, and benevolent environment" (Proposal for SJSCA special feature). They organized a workshop, where PhD candidates could confront the perceived gap between ideal and actual practices, between theoretical ideas, methodological issues and epistemological critics addressed in anthropological literature and the students' own research experiences during their PhD journey. The contributions in this SJSCA special issue thus reflect an important conversation that was initiated and deepened during the workshop on representational issues, arising in respective fields of a new generation of anthropologists and how they have dealt with them.

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MIGRATION, REPRESENTATION, AND REFLEXIVITY

An Intergenerational Dialogue on Current Issues

Serjara Aleman, Federica Moretti, and Sara Wiederkehr

Abstract

Contemporary anthropology increasingly confronts challenges of representation amid evolving cultural, social, and political landscapes. This special feature investigates how anthropologists engage in multimodal practices—from academic writing and digital media to performance and visualization—to convey research and negotiate power dynamics. It examines the transformation of field data into anthropological products, highlighting how politics, decoloniality, and ethical considerations shape representation. Through a two-part, student-led workshop, graduate students and practitioners explored alternative methods, employing self-reflection, performance, and creative visualization to address historical imbalances and misrepresentations. The resulting dialogue underscores the importance of reflexivity and engaged research practices that challenge traditional disciplinary boundaries. By integrating diverse perspectives and innovative techniques, the contributions call for a reimagined anthropology that embraces complexity and inclusivity while dismantling entrenched hierarchies. This feature ultimately advocates for a dynamic, performative approach to representing the "other" and rethinking scholarly practices. It offers a transformative roadmap for future anthropological inquiry with rigor.

Keywords: *engaged anthropology, multimodal practices, representation, reflexivity, performance*

How to deal with representation in a constantly shifting world while engaging in anthropology as a multimodal practice, from research design to communication? Anthropologists communicate with the academic public and other stakeholders in myriad ways, through writing (academic, journalistic, literary, fiction, poetic), screening (audiovisual, digital), and exhibition (performance, theatre, displaying of objects, exposition in visual and written forms) (Basu 2017). In all these instances of "communicating anthropology," representation takes place. The construction of the corpus of data and the transformation of data into anthropological products and outcomes are mediated by politics (Vargas-Cetina 2017). Anthropological fieldwork relies on the ethnographer's first-hand experience, which comprises the point of observation, the setting and context, the positionality of the researcher, and the audience or public that require the anthropologist to make the product understandable within a current cultural, social, and political environment. At the same time, public funding bodies increasingly demand a social impact aspect of research and "engaged" and "public" anthropology gain ground focusing on transformational or advisory goals (Larsen et al. 2022).

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Current debates about engaged anthropology, decoloniality, knowledge production, and modes of representation, in addition to the requirements of funding bodies and ethical questions that arise while working with sensitive subjects, generate fundamental questions for anthropologists in training, often destabilizing not only the research projects but the identity of the becoming-anthropologists themselves. The wave of decolonization processes that have overcome fields as varied as culture, art, and science makes us face the ongoing history of the discipline, while trying to become part of its scholarly community. What kind of anthropology do we want to make and be part of? To realize that we are walking on shaky ground while trying to find our way is a profoundly uncomfortable but transformative experience.

To engage with this discomfort, we organized a two-part experimental, student-led workshop that took place in 2020 (online) and 2021 (in person) as part of the CUSO program in anthropology. During this workshop, we wanted to create a safe space where graduate students could ask questions and share experiences in an open and receptive environment. We invited Susan Ossman, Eda Elif Tibet, Nadine Wanono, Monika Salzbrunn, and Esther Leeman, practitioners who are open to these questions, have experimented with different representation methods in their practice, and have carried out research that could widen our horizons and inspire different ways of thinking and working through the problems and challenges we are facing.

This space allowed us to experiment with and explore various techniques such as self-reflection, performance, drawings, and visualization to share our research projects' ideas, questions and findings. This approach points out performative and alternative narratives of research. Thus, partially responding to Arnd Schneider's call for "a new engagement with visual forms of research and representation beyond the sub-disciplinary confines of visual anthropology" (2008, 172), this special feature, based on the debates we had during the workshops, addresses critical questions of representation and reflexivity in anthropological research, especially in relation to migration studies.

From distinct perspectives, the four contributing articles discuss how representational issues arise in their respective fields: What and who is represented and how? Based on fieldwork experiences, the contributions shed light on problems, questions, and challenges arising from the politics of representation and how engaging the deconstruction of historical categories of analysis can help further current anthropological debates.

In addition to the written contributions, this special feature also contains a complementary audio file and photographs. This complies with the editors' desire to include other than written ways of doing and reflecting on today's anthropological endeavor. Reflecting on the politics of representation in anthropological work, how we present the "other" (including us), the interaction between the different groups and the way we present and express ideas, this feature also takes a stand against academic inequalities. To support change in the hierarchical representation of roles within the academic ecosystem, especially when it comes to publications, the editors of this volume present editors, contributors, and contributions in alphabetical order.

The articles presented in this special feature are based on three observations and the problems that derive from them. Firstly, since the representational debates of the 1980s, the discipline has gone through an epistemological shift from Geertz's "culture as text" to "culture as performance" (Fischer-Lichte 2009). Representation as performance allows us to think of rep-

Figure 1: Photograph of Susan Ossman during a performance exercise.
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Figure 2: Photograph of Michelle von Dach during the presentation
of another participant's visual interpretation of her research. © Sara Wiederkehr.

Figure 3: Photograph of Nina Khamsky during visualisation exercise. © Sara Wiederkehr.

Figure 4: Screenshot of the blog we created to accompany the workshop. © Serjara Aleman, Federica Moretti, Sara Wiederkehr.

Figure 5: Screenshot of the blog page where we collected the participants' questions in preparation of the workshop. © Serjara Aleman, Federica Moretti, Sara Wiederkehr.

resentation not as illustrating reality but as reality itself, as a process instead of a product. It allows us to rethink the politics of representation and the ethical debates linked to it. Secondly, for decades now, the increasing complexity of processes and phenomena such as globalization and transnational migration have called for new modes of representation (Jameson 1992 in Köhn 2016, 7). Thirdly, the notion that aesthetic decolonization is needed to disarm the colonial project and build decolonial subjectivities through alternative forms of understanding and explaining realities (Mignolo et al. 2013). These three interlinked debates—on alternative representations, performance, and decoloniality—across almost four decades of the anthropological discipline pushed us to propose a workshop involving different generations of anthropologists to confront questions related to migration, representation, and reflexivity.

The module created a space for graduate students to confront theoretical ideas, methodological issues, and epistemological critiques addressed in anthropological literature in light of their own research experiences. We wanted to be able to ask questions openly and confront the problems that arise from the gap between theory and practice and the difficulty in overcoming them, such as methodological or ethical concerns—best practice of collaboration, engaged or public anthropology, deconstructing the concepts we are used to work with to avoid the pitfalls of misrepresenting research participants or relations, or imposing epistemic violence.

The first contribution, "Échapper au jeu de la représéntation" by Claudia Howald, presents, through a dance at night in the desert, the author's critical reflection on the role of the researcher in (re)producing and (de)constructing people and places of the research. Working with youth collectives in Quibdó, the capital city of the Chocó Department in the Pacific region of Colombia, Howald reflects on the refusal of young people to engage in the *jeu de représentation* (representational game) by defying the image imposed on them. Power imbalances also characterize her research and become manifest in the suspicion of the youth she is working with of the possibility that she, as a white woman, mother, academic, employee, and Swiss national, reproduces asymmetries and stigmas with her work.

The second contribution, "Les paradoxes de la suspicion: réflexions autour d'une ethnographie numérique des 'paradoxes des permis F' parmi des jeunes Afghan.ne.s en Suisse" by Nina Khamsy, discusses the role of smartphones in the field and the digital social ties they can foster. She also proposes ethical reflections regarding collecting and publishing the results of her research, made complex by the digital. She addresses these power relations in the field and possible forms of collaboration as epistemological triggers.

The third contribution, "Violences de masse, autocensure et web diasporique: quand l'enquête de terrain nous confronte à la question du positionnement en ligne" by Léo Maillet, critically reflects on different forms of representation in relation to the digital world: the researcher, the research participants, the subject of study. In a profoundly reflexive piece, Léo shows how a potentially compromising event in the field can become a chance to situate oneself vis-à-vis one's interlocutors and change/counter present exogenous representations of the researcher.

Finally, the editors of this issue present a conversation with the invited colleagues Susan Ossman, Eda Elif Tibet, and Nadine Wanono. Here, different academic traditions and personal backgrounds nuance the understanding of anthropology as a monolithic practice and reflect on the relationship between migration and representation, drawing from specific experiences in digital media, affective multimodalities, and performance. The dialogue shows how research can be taught creatively and change according to its moment and place.

This exchange also highlights the importance of sharing and creating spaces where anthropological practice is invited to go beyond its self-imposed limits. In addition to the written excert, the podcast of the interview can be accessed via the QR code.

Figure 6: Code to access podcast of the interviews.

These contributions are framed by a foreword by the coordinator of the CUSO Program in Anthropology, Esther Leemann, and an afterword by our supervisor Monika Salzbrunn. The former sheds light on the current debates about higher education in Anthropology in Switzerland and their importance in developing the discipline, while the latter reflects on innovative teaching experiences involving multimodal research methods.

With the desire to valorize the pluri-linguistic exchanges and the diversity of research languages, the contributions are in English, French and German. The CUSO module brought together graduate students from the universities of Geneva, Neuchâtel, Fribourg, Lausanne, Bern, Lucerne, and Zurich, working in Asia, Europe, and the Americas. This feature presents the contributions of the participants who wanted to engage in this reflexive practice.

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ÉCHAPPER AU JEU DE LA REPRÉSENTATION

Claudia Howald

Résumé

Dans ma recherche doctorale, je me penche sur les pratiques de mémoire de collectifs de jeunes à Quibdó, capitale du département du Chocó (Pacifique colombien). Le Chocó est un territoire chargé par de nombreux stigmates et la jeunesse afro-colombienne à Quibdó est considérée Autre, dangereuse, exotique, symbole de rupture sociale ou génération perdue. Comment écouter une jeunesse racialisée et accueillir la perturbation productive qu'elle nous offre?

À travers d'une performance de dance, les collectifs de jeunes répondent activement aux regards hégémoniques, coloniaux et extractivistes. La performance ouvre un espace d'expression et d'écoute: les danseur·euse·x·s retournent le regard au public, l'interrogent et ne se laissent pas transformer en objets de spectacle. Ils et elles remettent en question le jeu même de la représentation, en se concentrant sur le fait de «parler» avec le corps et la danse, plutôt que de «représenter».

Mots clés: *représentation*, *danse*, *Chocó*, *jeunesse*, *ethnographie*, *expérience*

ESCAPING THE GAME OF REPRESENTATION

Abstract

In my doctoral research, I work on memory practices of youth collectives in Quibdó, capital of the department of the Chocó (Colombian Pacific). Chocó is a territory marked by many stigmas, and Afro-Colombian youth in Quibdó is considered Other, dangerous, exotic, a symbol of social rupture, or a lost generation. How can we listen to a racialized youth and welcome the productive disruption it offers us?

Through a dance performance, youth collectives actively respond to hegemonic, colonial, and extractivist gazes. The performance opens up a space for expression and listening: the dancers return the gaze to the audience, questioning them, not allowing themselves to be transformed into objects of spectacle. They question the act of representation itself, focusing on «speaking» with the body and dance, rather than «representing».

Keywords: *representation*, *dance*, *Chocó*, *youth*, *ethnography*, *experience*

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Dans le désert nocturne

Il fait nuit. Une danseuse réalise une performance dans le désert. Il n'y a personne. Pas de public humain. Obscurité. Pas de regards. Elle danse, la raison de son acte étant l'acte même, comme un rituel. La scène m'a été racontée comme une anecdote[1]*. Elle est imprimée dans ma mémoire, sans beaucoup de détails, et m'invite à la réflexion. Quel sens donner à cette performance ? Elle va au-delà de la représentation.*

L'anthropologie en tant que discipline s'est penchée de manière critique sur les questions relatives aux politiques de la représentation (Clifford et Marcus 1986 ; Marcus et Fischer 1986). En tant qu'anthropologue je suis consciente de ma responsabilité dans la production et reproduction de représentations concernant les contextes et les personnes avec lesquels je travaille. Dans ma recherche doctorale, je me penche sur les pratiques de mémoire au sein de collectifs de jeunes à Quibdó, capitale du département du Chocó, dans le Pacifique colombien[2]. En écoutant leurs pratiques de mémoire[3], j'explore ce que signifie être jeunes afro-colombien·ne·x·s à Quibdó, dans un contexte de guerre et au carrefour de multiples exclusions historiques. La recherche ethnographique, réalisée entre 2021 et 2024, intègre l'observation participante, des entretiens personnels et collectifs, des ateliers de photographie participative et de théâtre, ainsi que l'observation participante par le biais de médias sociaux, soit une ethnographie digitale (Pink et al. 2016) et à distance (Postill 2017). Elle s'appuie sur un engagement de longue durée avec un contexte qui a été « chez moi » entre 2012 et 2018. Alors que mon mari, leader afro-colombien d'un collectif de jeunes, travaillait dans de nombreux projets sociaux avec des jeunes, j'étais chercheuse au sein d'une université et d'une association culturelle touchant à des questions identitaires, territoriales, migratoires, urbaines et de jeunes. Ces différentes activités m'ont rapprochée des collectifs de jeunes. Par ailleurs, depuis des années, je pratique la danse et le théâtre de manière intermittente, expériences qui ont façonné mes interprétations des pratiques artistiques des jeunes[4].

Malgré mon imbrication personnelle avec le contexte, la recherche implique une rencontre traversée par des différences de pouvoir (Smith 2012). En tant que femme, blanche, mère, universitaire, employée, suissesse et actuellement résidente en Suisse, je me positionne

[1] L'anecdote est racontée en 2020 par l'anthropologue visuelle Nadine Wanono dans le cadre de l'atelier du Swiss Graduate Program in Anthropology « Migration, Représentation et Réflexivité », organisé par Serjara Aleman, Federica Moretti et Sara Wiederkehr. Il est possible que l'anecdote ne soit pas exactement comme ça et que j'aie causé une distorsion de la version « originale ».

[2] Projet doctoral « Prácticas de memoria y posmemoria de juventudes afrocolombianas en el Pacífico urbano », sous la direction de Marisa Ramos Gonçalves à l'Université de Coimbra (Portugal).

[3] Je me réfère aux pratiques de mémoire comme l'ensemble des discours, commémorations, marches, événements, rituels, productions et pratiques artistiques qui (re)produisent, mobilisent, articulent, (re)signifient et transforment les mémoires des jeunes relatives au dénommé « conflit armé interne » qui a fait irruption dans le Chocó dès les années 1990.

[4] Comme soulignent Neveu Kringelbach et Skinner, « dance scholars have often pointed out that watching and writing about dance was best done by people who possessed a form of ‹skilled vision› attuned to rhythmic movement » (2014, 5).

dans une posture de questionnement, de suspicion de reproduire les asymétries et exclusions (Esguerra Muelle 2019, 103-4). Au-delà de la réflexivité et d'assumer mon lieu d'énonciation (Ribeiro 2017), « comment raconter un·e autre racialisé·e, victimisé·e et exclu·e » (Vidal 2021)[5], qui habite un territoire invisibilisé et silencé ? Comment écouter une jeunesse racialisée et accueillir la perturbation productive qu'elle nous offre ?

Le Chocó, la jeunesse afro-colombienne et les politiques de représentations

Le Chocó est un territoire chargé par de nombreux stigmates. L'écrivaine afro-colombienne Velia Vidal me rappelle, qu'en tant que chercheuse « où poser son regard est un choix, surtout pour raconter un territoire qui porte tant de stigmates » (2021). Dans mes écrits académiques, je décris le Chocó comme ayant été historiquement représenté comme sous-développé, chaotique, lieu de guerre et de violences, un espace périphérique dans une nation centralisée. Il est également imaginé comme exotique, lieu de biodiversité, vantant la richesse de ses forêts, ses rivières et sa faune (Restrepo 2013). Je souligne aussi la coïncidence de ces imaginaires avec ses habitant·e·x·s, principalement personnes afro-colombiennes et peuples indigènes. J'aborde ainsi la continuité de relations et regards coloniaux, extractivistes et d'exclusion sur le Pacifique et ses populations, construites par les élites politiques et médiatiques du pays comme sous-humaines (Olaya Requene 2018). Cela est particulièrement vrai pour la jeunesse afro-colombienne à Quibdó, soumise à un processus d'*othering* (Abu-Lughod 1991 ; voir aussi Powell et Menendian 2024), considérée Autre, dangereuse, exotique, symbole de rupture sociale ou génération perdue (Diócesis de Quibdó 2013 ; Vega Pinzón 2016). Ces représentations se basent notamment sur la présence violente de gangs de jeunes et sur le chiffre très élevé de meurtres de jeunes dans la ville (Calle 2014 ; de Currea-Lugo 2015 ; Revista Semana 2013 ; 2023). Ces perspectives adulte-centrées persistent en Colombie, notamment dans la problématisation des thèmes violence/criminalité et sexualité/corps (Salazar 1990 ; Marzi 2018 ; Larrondo et Ponce Lara 2019). Par conséquent, « les jeunes entrent dans les récits de la modernité seulement quand ils [ainsi qu'elles] posent problème » (Comaroff et Comaroff 2005, 3).

Si nous choisissons de regarder autrement, les jeunes sont *makers* et *breakers* de la société (Honwana et De Boeck 2005) : ils et elles secouent et forgent constamment la société, de mille façons et à partir de multiples espaces, savoirs et pratiques, tout en étant à la fois forgé·e·x·s et secoué·e·x·s par elle. Les jeunes offrent une « perturbation productive des régimes épistémiques dominants » (Comaroff et Comaroff 2005, 3). Un exercice d'écoute s'avère nécessaire pour leur reconnaître une « place » dans la nation politique colombienne, ainsi que pour complexifier les récits vers une polyphonie de voix.

[5] Toutes les traductions depuis l'espagnol et depuis l'anglais sont de l'autrice.

La performance *Vérités invisibles*

La performance *Vérités invisibles*, réalisée par les collectifs artistiques de jeunes *Explosión Dance,*[6] *Black Boys Chocó*[7] et *Jóvenes Creadores del Chocó,*[8] sous la direction de ce dernier, clôture l'événement de la Commission de la Vérité[9] auquel j'assiste dans l'auditoire de l'université publique à Quibdó. La mise en scène raconte, au rythme *exótico*[10], comment la mort violente fait irruption dans la vie quotidienne des jeunes à Quibdó. Lors d'une fête, des jeunes hommes sont tués. La scène suscite suspicion et peur parmi les autres, qui fuient, jusqu'à ce que les mères viennent pleurer leurs morts. À ce moment, les autres jeunes reviennent sur scène pour le dernier acte de la pièce, s'alignent face à la salle, fixant le public sans bouger. La célèbre chanson *¿Quién los mató?* (« Qui les a tués ? »)[11], écrite et interprétée par Hendrix B, Nidia Góngora, Alexis Play et Junior Jein, artistes afro-colombien·ne·s du Pacifique, commence à résonner et devient un élément fondamental de la performance.

Sur scène, les jeunes synchronisé·e·x·s, formant un corps collectif, montrent leurs mains ouvertes, paumes vides et propres ; puis, comme si pointé·e·x·s par une arme, les lèvent vers le plafond, toujours visibles. La séquence est lente, marquée par les mouvements synchronisés et par les regards des jeunes, qui répondent au regard du public et semblent nous inviter à nous regarder en face. Ces regards, fermes et intenses, nous interrogent : Qui sommes-nous ? Qui est responsable ? Qui est complice ? Qui est innocent·e ? Les questions traversent les corps et les regards, ouvrant la scène à d'autres récits au-delà de la violence et de la douleur.

Les jeunes restent debout, paumes ouvertes au-dessus de la tête. L'intensité des gestes et des regards est telle que certaines personnes dans le public commencent à se lever et se joignent à la chorégraphie. Je me lève. Le mouvement naît de moi-même. Debout, les mains tendues au-dessus de la tête, j'accompagne leur profonde et pacifique contestation. Je ressens dans mon corps la douleur et le désespoir de ce geste, parce qu'il n'y a pas d'autre option. Je ressens l'injustice et nous sommes uni·e·x·s, en protestant, face à elle. En peu de temps, il n'y a plus une personne dans la salle qui ne se soit pas jointe à la performance. Un miroir s'installe entre danseur·euse·x·s et public, qui non seulement reflète les gestes, mais y répond et les soutient.

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[6] Collectif de danse urbaine basé dans le quartier San Vicente à Quibdó. Voir : https://www.youtube.com/@explosiondance138.

[7] Collectif de danse urbaine qui naît dans le quartier El Reposo de Quibdó. Voir : https://www.youtube.com/@blackboyschoco8142.

[8] Collectif de danse et théâtre qui travaille dans la création et la circulation de récits propres à partir du corps. Voir : https://www.youtube.com/@jovenescreadoresdelchocojc9173.

[9] La Commission de la Vérité a été créée à la suite de l'accord final, conclu en 2016, entre la guérilla des FARC-EP (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército Popular*) et le gouvernement, dans le cadre du système de justice transitionnelle. Les principaux objectifs de cette entité nationale autonome, temporaire et extrajudiciaire, étaient de clarifier les faits survenus dans le pays pendant la guerre, de contribuer à la reconnaissance des responsabilités, de reconnaître les victimes du conflit armé et de leur rendre leur dignité, ainsi que de promouvoir la coexistence et de proposer des mesures pour la non répétition.

[10] *Exótico* est un rythme urbain créé par des DJ de Quibdó et devenu populaire ces dernières années.

[11] La chanson commémore, dénonce et exige justice pour le massacre de cinq jeunes afro-colombiens à Llano Verde (Cali) en août 2020.

Lentement, les mains descendent et se posent derrière la tête, comme lors des fouilles policières. Les gestes sont lents, mais leur force vibre en moi. La chanson dénonce :

Rien, la vie des Noirs n'importe rien
La première chose qu'ils disent, c'est : ‹Ils étaient dans des affaires louches› [...].
Nous sommes victimes du système et de la négligence de l'État.
Mais le peuple n'abandonne pas, carajo*!*

Les jeunes dénoncent, par les gestes, le racisme et le meurtre systématique de jeunes afro-colombien·ne·x·s, l'« afrojuvénicide » (Santana Perlaza 2022), en Colombie et à Quibdó.

« Qui les a tués ? » demande la chanson dans l'auditoire, tandis que nous tournons le dos, en faisant preuve d'être complètement désarmé·e·x·s. Les bras se lèvent à nouveau et la musique insiste sur la question « qui les a tués ? ». Doucement, nous nous retournons pour nous regarder, les bras levés au-dessus de la tête. « Qui les a tués ? » questionne encore la chanson. Les regards semblent crier silencieusement et répétitivement « assez ! », alors que les mains descendent lentement, toujours révélant les paumes vides, propres et désarmées. La musique demande une fois de plus : « Qui les a tués ? Jusqu'à quand se poursuivra cette guerre qui coûte des vies innocentes ? ». Grâce à la performance, je ressens la violence historique inscrite dans les jeunes corps afro-colombiens. À travers de la performance, c'est comme si toute la salle affirmait à l'unisson « ça suffit ».

Soudain, nous levons le poing droit en l'air, un poing déterminé qui reste levé longtemps, donnant de la force à notre présence et à notre récit, un récit qui exige justice et un changement radical. Geste antiraciste de solidarité et de résistance, le poing droit levé est un symbole des mouvements antiracistes *Black Power*[12], qui a circulé depuis les années 1960 et qui a été repris avec force en 2020 lors de la vague des mouvements *Black Lives Matter*.

La musique se termine, les danseur·euse·x·s baissent lentement le poing et se tiennent debout en silence, regardant le public. Nous, aussi debout, fixons les danseur·euse·x·s. Les yeux brillent, les joues sont striées de larmes, le silence se fait. Quelque chose vient de se passer.

En quittant la salle, je discute avec une amie danseuse afro-colombienne. Elle affirme que, surtout pour le collectif *Jóvenes Creadores del Chocó*, « il ne s'agit pas de danser pour danser ».

La danse pour se raconter – le récit autrement

Les collectifs de jeunes avec qui je travaille à Quibdó répondent activement aux regards hégémoniques, coloniaux et extractivistes mentionnés dans la deuxième section de l'article. Leur stratégie a été de multiplier les récits qui circulent sur le Chocó en incluant les leurs, mais aussi de créer des références positives au niveau local. Les initiatives artistiques *Made*

[12] Mouvements issus aux États-Unis dans les années 1960. Le geste s'est popularisé depuis que les athlètes afro-américains Tommie Smith et John Carlos l'ont incorporé sur le podium des Jeux olympiques de 1968 sur l'air de l'hymne des États-Unis, affirmant ainsi les droits civiques de la population afro-américaine.

in Chocó[13], *Enamórate del Chocó*[14], *Explosión Dance*, *Black Boys Chocó* et *Jóvenes Creadores del Chocó* (*JCH*) s'insèrent dans cette ligne d'action. *Black Boys Chocó* est un collectif de jeunes de danse urbaine basé dans le quartier El Reposo de Quibdó, dont la plupart des habitant·e·x·s se reconnait comme victime du conflit armé[15]. Depuis la performance *Vérités invisibles*, il collabore de plus en plus avec *JCH*. Ce dernier est un collectif de danse-théâtre ayant gagné en reconnaissance à Quibdó et dans le monde de la danse colombienne depuis 2018. *JCH* a voyagé internationalement pour danser et pour se former, en participant à des résidences avec des personnages reconnus du monde de la danse, tels que la compagnie colombienne de danse afro-contemporaine *Sankofa* (2018), la danseuse et chorégraphe sénégalaise Germaine Acogny (2019) ou avec le *Ballet Preljocaj* de Marseille (2022).

Pour les jeunes de *JCH* et *Black Boys*, il ne s'agit pas simplement de suivre un parcours qui leur apprend à danser pour danser, mais de cultiver la danse comme outil d'expression pour pouvoir parler[16]. Leurs performances sont avant tout une manifestation d'existence de la jeunesse à Quibdó, une revendication de leur humanité face aux représentations, de la part des élites politiques et médiatiques du pays, comme sous-humaines (Olaya Requene 2018)[17]. Dans un contexte qui réduit au silence, criminalise et assassine ses jeunes, la performance prend un sens politique : elle ouvre un espace d'expression et d'écoute. Comme le souligne le danseur Rafael Palacios, directeur de *Sankofa*, dans un post sur la page Facebook du groupe, « nous dansons, plus que pour être vus, pour être écoutés ! » (Sankofa Danzafro 2021). Écouter un corps est très significatif, d'autant plus si l'on considère la discrimination, l'exotisation et la sexualisation qui ont historiquement et profondément marqué, exploité, violé et rendu Autres les corps (jeunes) afro-colombiens (Wade et al. 2008). Le corps, au cœur des performances,

> *n'est pas un espace neutre ou transparent ; le corps humain est vécu de manière intensément personnelle (mon corps), produit et coparticipant de forces sociales qui le rendent visible (ou invisible) à travers des notions de genre, sexualité, race, classe et appartenance* (Taylor 2011, 12).

Le corps afro-colombien a historiquement constitué le contrepoint, l'altérité, pour penser et définir le corps blanc comme corps civilisé ; selon la logique coloniale, il a été sexualisé, animalisé, exotisé, exploité (Wade 1997). Viveros Vigoya (2009) souligne la persistance de la sexualisation de la « race » en Colombie, qui maintient et naturalise les différences raciales. Cette insistance sur le corps afro-colombien (re)produit une distance sociopolitique, reléguant constamment cette population à la dimension de l'exotique (Viveros Vigoya 2009).

[13] Collectif de jeunes qui s'occupe de la création, promotion et circulation de récits, d'images et de références positives sur le Chocó. Voir : madeinchocoquibdo.wixsite.com/websitemadeinchoco.

[14] Projet artistique du photographe *Waosolo* qui a comme but de complexifier les représentations et images du Chocó, surtout avec la production d'images esthétiques qui exaltent la beauté des lieux, des cultures et des personnes. Voir : https://enamoratedelchoco.co/.

[15] Conformément à la loi sur les victimes (loi 1448 de 2011).

[16] Je m'inspire du concept de « pouvoir parler » de Spivak (1993). L'autrice se réfère à l'incapacité de certains sujets (sujets subalternes) de parler et d'être entendus, en raison de structures de domination qui les réduisent au silence.

[17] Concernant la danse en relation avec les droits humains, les mouvements sociaux et la revendication de l'humanité, voir Jackson et Phim (2008).

L'écoute de ces corps est empêchée par le regard, dominant dans le concept de spectacle, qui constitue «un rapport social entre des personnes, médiatisé par des images» (Debord 2010, 4). Cette relation est normalisante, affirme Taylor, car le spectacle enferme les gens dans une économie du regard (1997, 119). Afin de permettre l'écoute, il faut inverser la logique du spectacle, modifier cette relation médiatisée par l'image, pour construire autre forme de relation entre les jeunes de *JCH* et *Black Boys* et leur public. C'est à cela qu'aspirent les danseur·euse·x·s de la performance *Vérités invisibles*, qui retournent le regard au public, l'interrogent et ne se laissent pas transformer en objets de spectacle. Leurs yeux exigent une reconnaissance des jeunes en tant que sujets qui parlent et méritent d'être écoutés.

Black Boys et *JCH* revendiquent la possibilité, pour un corps jeune afro-colombien, d'être en scène pour parler et être écouté[18]. Comme l'explique Jhonatan, leader de *Black Boys*, «lorsqu'ici la guerre nous arrache un jeune, nous voulons savoir pourquoi [...]; nous dansons parce que nous voulons savoir pourquoi» (Comisión de la Verdad 2020). Luis, autre jeune membre de *Black Boys*, souligne:

> *Cela fait longtemps que nous exigeons la vérité. En plus d'exiger la vérité, nous montrons notre propre vérité, ce que nous vivons tous les jours dans le Chocó, à travers la danse, à travers l'art. [...] En ce moment, je pense que les jeunes, nous sommes les plus stigmatisés et les plus affectés par la violence ici dans ce département et peut-être dans le pays, à cause de ce que nous vivons tous les jours* (Comisión de la Verdad 2020).

Katherin, leader de *JCH*, considère la danse comme une possibilité de «raconter la vérité». Raconter la vérité est un acte de dénonciation: «Nous dénonçons pour que cela [l'afrojuvénicide] ne se répète pas, nous dénonçons pour que les droits soient garantis, pour que la vie de la jeunesse du département du Chocó soit respectée» (Comisión de la Verdad 2020). La vérité, pour Katherin, est intimement liée à la dignité de chaque personne, à sa liberté d'être et d'exister, dans un contexte qui anéantit quotidiennement sa jeunesse.

Les processus de racialisation et sexualisation silencent la jeunesse afro-colombienne parce que «les voix des personnes ne comptent que si leurs corps ‹importent›» (Couldry 2010, 130). Selon Couldry, «les personnes doivent d'abord être visibles avant d'être reconnues comme ayant une voix» (2010, 130). À travers des performances de danse dans des festivals, dans les rues, dans les médias sociaux, lors des mobilisations sociales et d'événements, tels que celui organisé par la Commission de la Vérité, *JCH* et *Black Boys* luttent pour une voix en mettant en place une pédagogie de la présence (Mbembe 2015), à savoir «un ensemble de pratiques créatives qui finissent par rendre impossible pour les structures officielles de les ignorer et de ne pas les reconnaître, de prétendre qu'ils et elles ne soient pas là [...] ou de prétendre que leur voix ne compte pas» (Mbembe 2015, 6).

En outre, ces collectifs explorent comment habiter des corps racialisés sur scène «sans tomber dans le répertoire des images patriarcales et coloniales» (Taylor 2011, 12) de la société

[18] Afin de soutenir l'analyse et d'éviter la surinterprétation, j'intègre des voix orales de jeunes des collectifs *JCH* et *Black Boys*, même si mon objectif était d'écouter leurs corps dansants. Leurs voix orales soutiennent en fait la même argumentation que leurs corps dansants.

colombienne, sans tomber dans la surdétermination de l'extérieur (Fanon 2009, 115). Existe-t-il une voix, si le langage même est imprégné de catégories coloniales (Couldry 2010, 122)[19]? *Sankofa* ainsi que *JCH* et *Black Boys* remettent en question le jeu même de la représentation, et vont plus loin en se concentrant sur le fait de «parler» avec le corps et la danse, plutôt que de «représenter». Ils travaillent pour se (ré)approprier leurs corps; ils occupent consciemment la danse, lieu où ils ont été relégués, comme langage[20]. À partir de là, ils explorent et construisent une voix: «Pour nous, la danse est notre propre histoire [...], c'est notre voix d'autoréférence» (Plan Nacional de Danza 2019). Dans les dernières années, *JCH* et *Black Boys* ont construit une voix à partir de la danse exotique («el exótico»), un rythme nouveau crée à Quibdó par les jeunes DJs afro-colombiens. La musique et la danse exotique mélangent différents éléments de contextes afro-diasporiques globaux (l'influence de Michael Jackson est très grande) avec des éléments de Quibdó (ses rythmes, slangs, et même des sons quotidiens) (Kienyke 2023; Comisión de la Verdad 2022a). «El exótico», pour les jeunes de ces collectifs signifie liberté de mouvements et d'expression, diversion, moquerie des catégories et transformation des réalités sociales[21], mais aussi revendication et proteste face à l'exclusion et la violence quotidienne (Comisión de la Verdad 2022a). Cette danse permet d'habiter autrement l'exotisation constante des corps jeunes afro-colombiens: elle se moque des catégories imposées et les transforme. «El exótico» est présent et active les espaces de mobilisations et protestations sociales dans les rues de Quibdó. Dans les mots des jeunes de *JCH*, «l'exotique est à nous» (Comisión de la Verdad 2022a). Ainsi, *JCH* et *Black Boys* jouent au spectacle, toute en échappant à la logique normalisante du spectacle (Taylor 2011, 26).

Le contexte d'origine de la danse de *JCH* et *Black Boys* est un élément clé pour savoir écouter les corps dansants, qui réalisent ce qui est, en-même temps, une pratique de mémoire, une protestation sociale, un espace de protection, une pédagogie de présence, un espace de voix, une narration de soi. La danse devient un lieu politique, car un·e jeune qui danse «c'est un corps capable de s'exprimer pour exiger justice, pour exiger ce à quoi il a droit dans cette société» (Hacemos Memoria 2022). Les jeunes à Quibdó exigent leur droit à se représenter et à se raconter, tout en questionnant l'idée même de représentation. Katherin Gil, leader de *JCH*, se réfère à cela lorsqu'elle déclare que le Chocó est toujours raconté depuis l'extérieur et qu'en tant que collectif de jeunes, «nous voulons nous raconter nous-mêmes à travers de l'art» (Corporaloteca 2021). Elle revendique le droit de se raconter et de se penser, car «la possibilité de se penser nous a été enlevée» (Comisión de la Verdad 2022b). Vidal souligne également le problème des récits: «Historiquement, nous n'avons pas eu la possibilité de nous raconter nous-mêmes et il est absolument nécessaire que nous puissions raconter nos propres histoires» (Santaeulalia 2022). Ces réflexions évoquent la problématisation des récits hégé-

[19] Couldry fait référence au concept de *double consciousness*, «this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others», de Du Bois (2007, 8) et aux écrits de Frantz Fanon (2009).

[20] Cela rappelle les mots de Savigliano au sujet du tango: «Tango is the main ingredient in my project of decolonization because I have no choice. It is the stereotype of the culture to which I belong. If I reject my stereotype I fall, caught in nowhere. Caught in endless explanations of what I am not and justifications of what I am. Caught in comparisons with the colonizer. By assuming the tango attitude and taking it seriously, I can work at expanding its meaning and power. My power, actively tango. Tango is my strategic language, a way of talking about, understanding, exercising decolonization» (1995, 16).

[21] La moquerie de catégories et formes de danse hégémoniques a été historiquement présente et intégrée dans les pratiques de danse des peuples colonisés (Reed 1998, 509).

moniques perçus comme des récits uniques de l'histoire, qui masquent la polyphonie des voix et narrations, comme suggéré par Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2018).

La complexification des récits passe par l'inclusion d'autres voix, d'autres regards, d'autres épistémologies et ontologies et par l'activation d'autres sens. Il s'agit de déplacer le regard en tant que sens central et axe hégémonique de la production de savoirs et représentations (Barriendos 2011), pour récupérer l'expérience de nos sens. Je pense alors à nouveau à la performance *Vérités invisibles*, ainsi qu'au moment déclencheur de ces réflexions, la danseuse dans le désert nocturne évoquée au début de l'article, une danseuse qui échappe au regard, peut-être à la recherche d'autres sens ou de la non-représentation.

Vers des approches de la non-représentation – l'expérience au centre

Les approches de la non-représentation (Boyd 2017) embrassent l'incertitude et le désordre, elles s'intéressent à la manière dont la vie se déroule, laissant place à ce qui émerge, à ce qui n'est pas encore. Dans ce sens, le problème avec les représentations réside dans ce qu'elles laissent échapper. L'expérience est placée au centre de ces approches relationnelles et incorporées, qui impliquent « placer la pensée entre les espaces de sensation et de signification, créer des perspectives qui vibrent » (Boyd 2017, 33). L'expérience (ce qui nous arrive) nous touche et nous transforme ; elle permet l'affect, c'est-à-dire « la capacité des corps à affecter et à être affectés par d'autres corps, qu'ils soient humains, non humains, animés ou inanimés » (Boyd 2017, 36). Elle permet aussi de nous reconnaître dans une condition commune, c'est une opportunité de « dé/faire les différences » (« un/doing differences ») (Hirschauer 2014) ou d'« appartenir sans s'aliéner » (« belonging without othering ») (Powell et Menendian 2024).

L'expérience est au cœur de la danse ; le mouvement est une expérience émergente et du sensible : « Dans le mouvement, on fait et on se sent faire en même temps » (Sklar 2000, 72). La danse devient dans sa pratique (Neveu Kringelbach et Skinner 2014, 2). L'expérience est aussi au cœur de l'anthropologie, cela étant fondée sur une méthode de l'expérience et caractérisée par une inclination « de penser et de travailler dans le flux des circonstances » (Pandian 2019, 10). Pratiquer l'anthropologie signifie, donc, se syntoniser avec la vie telle qu'elle arrive, en habitant d'autres modalités de conscience dans lesquelles les sens sont essentiels (Pandian 2019) ; il s'agit de « manières d'être autant que de manières de faire » (Pandian 2019, 3).

Même si l'approche de la non-représentation est impossible dans la pratique, puisque « nous ne produisons jamais que des compréhensions partielles de l' ‹ événementialité › [« eventhood »][22] du monde », nous pouvons travailler à la création de concepts, approches et méthodes qui ont le potentiel de fournir des « compréhensions cohérentes » du monde (Boyd 2017, 33). Sa force serait justement sa capacité à déstabiliser et à perturber les notions de l'humain, du devenir et des relations avec le non-humain et la planète.

Pandian (2019) se penche sur ce qui peut contribuer l'anthropologie dans le monde contemporain, en considérant son héritage colonial et ambigu. Il souligne « son insistance sur le caractère ouvert de ce qui est humain » (2019, 13), qui permet d'expandre l'horizon du

[22] Boyd se réfère à la propriété du monde d'être construit par événements.

possible et de l'humanité[23] : « L'anthropologie nous apprend à rechercher les faces invisibles du monde qui nous entoure, à nous confronter à son ouverture par l'expérience et la rencontre, et à prendre ces ouvertures comme les germes d'une humanité à venir » (2019, 3)[24]. Cette anthropologie possible se rapproche de l'art (Pandian 2019), danse comprise, et ouvre des espaces d'imagination anthropologiques, car « tout artiste réagit instinctivement au monde » (Wang 2008, 131). Comme écrit le chorégraphe et artiste Lemi Ponifasio : « Je suis reconnaissant pour le don de la danse. C'est un esprit miraculeux qui active notre parenté avec le monde, avec les vivants, avec les morts, avec la rivière, avec la pierre, avec le ciel et avec tous les êtres sensibles » (2008, 201).

Conclusion

L'anthropologue et danseuse afro-américaine Katherine Dunham concevait la danse comme « la forme par excellence d'une ethnographie incorporée » (Neveu Kringelbach et Skinner 2014, 5). Travaillant depuis l'anthropologie, nous pouvons interroger et expandre les méthodes et l'écriture ethnographique pour capter la vie telle qu'elle est vécue, incorporant l'expérience, le corps, et les affects comme axes et forces motrices (Bidaseca 2018). « L'écriture comme méta-danse », propose Sklar (2000, 75), en engageant la mémoire corporelle de l'anthropologue.

Il s'agit également de reconnaître l'Autre et son récit dans ses propres termes ; de savoir se taire et écouter, parce que « le silence est une écoute et permet à la parole d'être entendue » (Patterson citée dans Lima 2020). Palacios, de la compagnie *Sankofa*, insiste sur le fait que « le public doit apprendre à lire l'implicite » (Hacemos Memoria 2022). Il faut donc respecter le droit à se représenter, à se raconter, et dialoguer vers une balance de récits (Achebe 2000), mais aussi respecter les silences, le trouble et le flou ; le droit à la non-représentation et à l'expérience. Respecter le droit d'échapper au jeu de la représentation ; de retourner le regard, nous interroger et nous sentir affecté·e·x·s. Le droit de danser seule dans le désert nocturne, dans l'obscurité, parce qu'il s'agit de la puissance de l'acte en soi même.

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[23] Les ouvrages de Michael Fischer (2003 ; 2009) vont dans ce même sens.

[24] Cette conceptualisation de l'anthropologie a permis le développement récent d'approches qui saisissent la multiplicité et la complexité, les enchevêtrements et le relationnel du monde (Cadena et Blaser 2018 ; Escobar 2016 ; Haraway 2016 ; Tsing et al. 2024).

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RÉFLEXIVITÉ EN MILIEUX NUMÉRIQUES

Perspectives d'une recherche ethnographique parmi de jeunes Afghan·e·s dans le système d'asile suisse

Nina Khamsy

Résumé

Cet article explore l'apport essentiel d'une approche réflexive dans la conduite d'une ethnographie en milieux numériques, afin de révéler comment les relations de pouvoir s'articulent avec les pratiques numériques. Mon travail de terrain, réalisé entre 2021 et 2022 parmi de jeunes Afghan·e·s dans le système d'asile suisse, examine comment les statuts juridiques précaires, tels que les permis temporaires, influencent les pratiques numériques et l'usage des technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC). En analysant de manière collaborative avec les participant·e·s les contenus et interactions en ligne, on perçoit l'articulation des dynamiques d'autonomisation et les mécanismes de surveillance à des échelles transnationales. La diversité des contenus médiatiques partagés est façonnée par la sensibilité des jeunes à leurs publics, leur statut précaire, et les dynamiques sociopolitiques, qui sont impactées par la détérioration de la situation en Afghanistan depuis août 2021, ainsi que la méfiance institutionnelle et leurs contraintes économiques en Suisse.

Mots clés : *migration*, *réflexivité*, *digital*, *surveillance*, *Afghanistan*, *précarité*

REFLEXIVITY IN DIGITAL CONTEXTS. PERSPECTIVES FROM ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AMONG YOUNG AFGHANS IN THE SWISS ASYLUM SYSTEM

Abstract

This article presents the essential input of reflexivity for conducting ethnographic research in digital contexts to highlight how power relations are articulated with digital practices. Drawing on fieldwork conducted between 2021 and 2022 among young Afghans in the Swiss asylum system, this paper examines how precarious legal statuses, such as those associated with temporary permits, shape digital practices and uses of Information and communications technology (ICT). By analysing online content and digital interactions collaboratively with my research participants, the study highlights how empowerment and surveillance mechanisms intertwine at transnational scales that contextualise digital practices. The diversity of shared media content is shaped by young people's attunement to their audiences, their own precarious status, and sociopolitical dynamics, which, for this population, are impacted by the deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan since August 2021, as well as by institutional mistrust and the economic constraints they face in Switzerland.

Keywords: *migration*, *reflexivity*, *digital*, *surveillance*, *Afghanistan*, *precarity*

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Introduction

L'écouteur sans fil ne quitte presque jamais Farzanah[1]. Cette imitation d'AirPods, semblable à une perle nichée sur son oreille est presque toujours présente. Par un après-midi d'automne 2021, comme à notre habitude, nous nous retrouvons à la gare centrale de la ville suisse où nous habitons toutes les deux. Notre poignée de main et notre embrassade sont entremêlées de salutations en persan[2], alors qu'elle poursuit son échange via son écouteur. Elle est en ligne avec sa sœur ainée à Mazar-el-Sharif, en Afghanistan, à l'autre bout d'un appel WhatsApp. En raccrochant, Farzanah confirme ce que j'avais deviné en écoutant leur discussion. Elle me confie que l'image que ses proches se font de sa vie en Suisse – un pays d'asile idyllique aux paysages verdoyants, fertiles à un avenir sans entraves – ne reflète que vaguement son quotidien. Farzanah rencontre des difficultés pour dénicher un emploi et réussir son «intégration», notamment en raison de son permis temporaire.

Comme d'autres jeunes Afghan·e·s que j'ai rencontré·e·s lors de mon travail de terrain en Suisse auprès de personnes demandeuses d'asile et réfugiées, Farzanah attache une grande importance à rester connectée avec ses proches, principalement à travers des conversations et des échanges de contenus multimédias. L'écouteur reflète son souci d'être toujours joignable. Toutefois, elle ajuste le contenu de ses récits et ses photos sur les réseaux sociaux en fonction de ses interlocuteur·ice·s: certaines informations sont réservées à sa sœur, d'autres à sa mère, et d'autres encore à ses connaissances en Suisse, comme moi.

Cette vignette illustre l'importance des technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC) dans le maintien du lien à distance et met en lumière l'entrelacement des contextes «en ligne» et «hors ligne» dans la vie quotidienne de Farzanah. Les récits qu'elle produit se révèlent parfois complémentaires, parfois divergents. L'anthropologie des pratiques numériques nécessite que la recherche soit attentive aux particularités qu'impliquent les TIC pour certain·e·s usager·ère·s dans des contextes spécifiques (Coleman 2010). Le fait migratoire parmi des personnes en situation de précarité (réfugié·e·s, exilé·e·s sans papiers exposé·e·s à une possible déportation) met en exergue que l'usage des TIC est intrinsèquement lié à des processus d'autonomisation, de contrôle et de surveillance (Nedelcu et Soysüren 2022). Comment, alors, situer les usages des TIC dans l'expérience des jeunes réfugié·e·s Afghan·e·s en Suisse, en tenant compte de ces dynamiques ambivalentes? Dans quelle mesure l'ethnographie en contextes numériques contribue-t-elle à renforcer ces dynamiques ou, au contraire, à les subvertir?

Pour mener à bien cette recherche, j'ai analysé, en collaboration avec mes interlocuteur·ice·s, leurs pratiques numériques ainsi que les contenus en ligne durant mon travail de terrain en Suisse entre 2021 et 2022[3]. Cette démarche m'a permis d'articuler mes observations des réseaux sociaux et mes observations participantes en face à face, mettant en lumière la continuité des interactions «en ligne» et «hors ligne» (Hine 2015). Afin de saisir l'ambi-

[1] Tous les prénoms de participant·e·s à ma recherche dans cet article sont des pseudonymes.

[2] Mon persan est Iranien et il est similaire au persan parlé en Afghanistan. Les deux variations sont mutuellement intelligibles.

[3] Dans cet article je n'ai pas la place d'aborder la question du contrôle des téléphones portables des requérant·e·s d'asile par les autorités. Cette pratique a été adoptée par le Conseil fédéral et il est prévu qu'elle entre en vigueur en 2025 (RTS 2024).

guïté inhérente aux TIC qui participent simultanément à des processus d'autonomisation et de surveillance, je soutiens que la réflexivité en milieux numériques constitue un outil ethnographique essentiel. Elle implique notamment de prendre en compte les échelles d'analyse pertinentes du point de vue des participant·e·s, afin de mieux situer les rapports de pouvoir et contextualiser les usages.

Pour illustrer mon propos, je m'appuie sur l'ethnographie menée auprès de Farzanah, Mohammad et Ali, trois jeunes originaires d'Afghanistan[4] ayant grandi dans des milieux de classe moyenne. Âgé·e·s d'une vingtaine d'années, ces jeunes vivent en Suisse avec un permis temporaire F depuis deux à quatre ans. Une difficulté essentielle pour les jeunes migrant·e·s Afghan·e·s en Europe est de «réussir leur migration» (*being a successful migrant*) (Scalettaris et al. 2021 [2019]). Les aspirations et décisions de beaucoup de jeunes sont façonnées par une économie morale de la migration, qui articule solidarité familiale et pression individuelle à réussir, dans un contexte marqué par la concurrence et la quête de reconnaissance (Scalettaris et al. 2021 [2019], 1).

Compte tenu de l'ampleur de ce sujet, je ne peux approfondir certaines dimensions importantes, telles que la réalité hétérogène des «migrant·e·s Afghan·e·s», les littératies et langues utilisées, le rôle du genre et de la génération ou encore celui des espaces «privés» et «publiques». Mon analyse se concentre sur la manière dont les précarités à différentes échelles jouent un rôle dans les usages des TIC; en particulier en ce qui concerne les paradoxes associés au permis temporaire (Bertrand 2020). La gestion des liens familiaux transnationaux et de l'injonction à «l'intégration» offre une clé pour comprendre les dynamiques d'autonomisation et les mécanismes de surveillance auxquels les usager·ère·s répondent.

Les paradoxes du permis F: entre défis structurels et injonctions à «l'intégration»

La situation de Farzanah, mise au bénéfice d'un «permis F étranger[5]» depuis deux ans, illustre les tensions de la protection temporaire. Ce permis, octroyé à plus de 80% des Afghan·e·s ayant obtenu une admission (statut de réfugié·e ou admission provisoire) en Suisse lors de mon enquête en 2022 (SEM 2022)[6], révèle des contradictions profondes. Le secrétaire d'État aux migrations (SEM) ordonne la décision de ce permis de résidence lorsque la demande d'asile est rejetée mais que l'exécution du renvoi vers le pays d'origine est impossible, illicite ou qu'elle ne peut être raisonnablement exigée (SEM 2019). Il couvre une durée de douze mois et peut être renouvelé. Cependant, ce permis dit «provisoire» contraste avec la durée réelle des séjours de celles et ceux qui en sont doté·e·s car la moitié des personnes avec des permis F vivaient en Suisse depuis plus de sept ans en 2015 (ODAE 2015). Il existe des critères d'intégration à remplir pour demander un permis plus stable; l'acquisition d'une langue nationale, d'un travail, d'une indépendance financière et donc de la sortie de l'aide sociale, pour qu'après cinq ans, une demande de permis plus stable (permis B) puisse être déposée (SEM 2019).

[4] Ce travail de terrain doctoral a suivi plusieurs trajectoires migratoires de jeunes Afghan·e·s (en Suisse, Italie, Bosnie et Serbie).

[5] En 2023, 45 000 personnes admises à titre provisoire (permis F) vivaient en Suisse (CSIAS 2023).

[6] Ce calcul est basé sur «les Statistiques en matière d'asile» (SEM 2022).

Bien que les titulaires de permis F soient encouragé·e·s à « s'intégrer » dans l'espoir d'obtenir un permis de séjour stable, ces personnes se heurtent à des obstacles découlant notamment de la méfiance institutionnelle et des contraintes économiques. Ces obstacles sont en grande partie liés aux limitations réglementaires de ces permis provisoires, qui entravent la participation économique et sociale des personnes concernées (ODAE 2015).

Par exemple, les employeurs hésitent souvent à embaucher des titulaires de permis F, ce qui limite leur accès à l'emploi. D'autres restrictions touchent la mobilité, tant à l'intérieur de la Suisse qu'au-delà de ses frontières, le regroupement familial, l'accès à la formation et le recours à l'aide sociale (ODAE 2015). Ces limitations s'inscrivent dans un cadre politique marqué par une méfiance à l'égard des immigré·e·s, une tendance qui s'est renforcée depuis les années 1980 avec la politisation de la question migratoire. La « lutte contre les abus » (Miaz 2020) qui figure parmi les objectifs principaux avancés lors des révisions de la politique suisse d'asile[7] met en avant le danger que représentent celles et ceux qui fraudent le système de l'asile (Miaz 2020, 193). Ce régime de suspicion caractéristique de la gouvernance migratoire se retrouve au niveau individuel/affectif (dans les institutions) ainsi qu'au niveau structurel/matériel (technologies aux frontières) (Borrelli et al. 2022). Les mesures politiques visent ainsi à produire un effet dissuasif en réduisant « l'attractivité » du pays afin de diminuer les demandes à traiter (Bertrand 2020, 44).

La notion « d'intégration » montre dès lors des divergences entre ses dimensions juridiques et pratiques. L'absence d'intégration des requérant·e·s d'asile dans le tissu social helvétique durant la durée de la prise de décision vise à faciliter leur renvoi éventuel (Parini 1997, 64). Par ailleurs, la croissance des titres de séjours n'offrant qu'une protection temporaire complique aussi l'intégration (Piguet 2017, 86, 103). En termes des critères du « degré d'intégration » des personnes d'origine étrangère, les textes législatifs reviennent sur les critères du respect de la loi, de la connaissance de la langue et de la volonté de participation au marché du travail (Bertrand 2020, 64). Si les ressources et la débrouillardise des exilé·e·s contribuent à l'intégration, c'est surtout le statut juridique, par sa présence ou son absence, qui constitue « une des clefs de voûte de l'insertion ou de la précarisation, voire de l'exclusion » (Bolzman 2001, 136). Concernant le permis F, un tribunal bernois a jugé en 2022 que le faible montant de l'aide sociale accordé aux titulaires de ce permis constituait un obstacle à leur intégration, alors même que celle-ci est paradoxalement exigée (CSIAS 2023, 5).

Une ethnographie réflexive en milieux numériques prend en compte ces enjeux posés par le statut précaire et leur impact sur les usages des TIC. La méfiance institutionnelle envers les requérant·e·s d'asile se matérialise par des obstacles réglementaires et économiques dans le domaine des TIC. Par exemple, les titulaires de permis temporaires tels que les permis F et N[8] font face à des restrictions, notamment en ce qui concerne l'accès aux abonnements mobiles, souvent limité ou conditionné par leur statut administratif. Au moment de l'étude, les trois principaux opérateurs de télécommunication mobile suisses posaient des conditions spécifiques aux titulaires de ces permis afin de s'assurer de la solvabilité de leurs client·e·s. Il s'agissait d'une lourde caution ou du paiement d'un certain nombre de mois d'abonnement mensuel en avance. Cela avait fait l'objet d'une interpellation au Parlement en 2017 souli-

[7] La Loi sur l'asile (LAsi) est entrée en vigueur en 1981.

[8] Ces permis sont définis et abordés de manière détaillée dans les travaux d'Anne-Laure Bertrand (2020).

gnant les obstacles pour les personnes issues de l'asile à la téléphonie (Bulletin officiel 2017). Des tarifs solidaires ne sont pas envisagés pour les personnes détentrices de ce type de permis. Pourtant, cela n'est pas le cas pour tous les permis temporaires. Suite à l'éclatement du conflit en Ukraine, la Suisse a activé le statut de protection S pour les Ukrainien·ne·s. Ce permis temporaire vise à «soutenir les personnes concernées dans leur intégration, notamment sur le marché du travail et dans la formation» (SEM 2024). Ce permis donne aussi accès à des tarifs solidaires et services gratuits en matière de télécommunication (Swisscom 2023).

En pratique, l'intégration est une construction, elle «n'est pas un état de fait scientifiquement exact, cautionné par la loi, mais constitue la somme de processus vivants, mis en œuvre, régulés, entravés, agis et vécus, subis ou soufferts» (Di Donato et al. 2020, 16). On voit en effet que faciliter l'accès aux TIC pour les personnes en situation de précarité peut réduire certaines de ces entraves. Ainsi, le paradoxe des permis F permet de contextualiser comment Farzanah, Mohammad et Ali adaptent leurs usages des TIC, ce que j'explore dans ce qui suit.

Lors de notre rencontre à la gare, Farzanah me lance: «*Kâr kheili dârim!*» («Nous avons beaucoup de travail!»). Ce lieu, un point central de télécommunication, est notre rendez-vous habituel. Nous nous rendons à une boutique de téléphonie mobile pour demander un nouveau plan de paiement mensuel pour des AirPods originaux, qu'elle juge indispensables pour rester connectée de manière optimale, mais qu'elle ne peut se permettre de payer qu'en plusieurs fois. Je traduis sa demande au vendeur. Elle a également souscrit à un forfait internet à paiement anticipé, car le wifi dans sa résidence pour migrant·e·s est instable. Ces frais représentent près de 80 francs par mois (50 francs pour le mobile et 30 francs pour les données), une somme importante alors que son aide sociale, liée à son permis temporaire, s'élève à environ 370 francs suisses mensuels. Cette situation illustre le paradoxe suivant, plus large: une personne étrangère est sommée de s'intégrer, mais son intégration est entravée à cause de la précarité et de la méfiance dont elle fait l'objet.

Comme Farzanah, Mohammad, un jeune homme originaire de Kabul, doit gérer de nombreuses démarches administratives auxquelles nous tentons de répondre ensemble. Mohammad a obtenu un permis temporaire en Suisse après y avoir déposé une demande d'asile en 2019. Durant sa première année, il ne pouvait souscrire à un abonnement de téléphonie mobile à cause de son permis temporaire et ne disposait pas de ressources nécessaires pour s'acheter une carte prépayée avec des données internet en quantité suffisante. Il résidait dans un foyer dépourvu d'un wifi stable, alors il a trouvé des équipements publics pour pallier ces manques. Il a appris à repérer les lieux dans la ville mettant à disposition un réseau wifi gratuit, comme les gares ou les centres commerciaux, et à identifier les points où le débit était plus ou moins fiable.

Ces pratiques, m'explique Mohammad lors d'une promenade en ville, sont similaires à celles qu'il a développées pendant sa trajectoire migratoire, notamment durant les deux années passées dans un camp de réfugié·e sur une île grecque. Bien que l'usage du wifi public expose ses connexions à des vulnérabilités, cette accessibilité offre plus d'autonomie. Dans ce contexte, les contraintes liées à sa précarité, qui motivent ses déplacements pour accéder à Internet, expliquent le rythme intermittent de sa présence «en ligne». Ce constat souligne comment les conditions matérielles précaires et les barrières structurelles façonnent les spatialités et temporalités de sa présence «en ligne».

Mes observations auprès de jeunes Afghan·e·s en Suisse confronté·e·s aux paradoxes du permis F montrent aussi que l'accès aux TIC favorisent «l'intégration» lorsqu'elle est comprise comme une manière de réduire les obstacles et gagner en autonomie. Cet accès permet aux individus de mobiliser leurs propres réseaux pour répondre aux défis identifiés dans leur quotidien. Dans cette perspective, les études transnationales des TIC soulignent l'importance des liens transnationaux continus que les personnes migrantes entretiennent avec leurs sociétés d'origine et la manière dont ces liens influencent leurs expériences dans leur société d'accueil, au-delà des liens étroits de fratrie ou d'ethnie (Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Dahinden 2005). L'expansion des TIC cimente les groupes transnationaux et favorise la co-présence dans les relations familiales (Diminescu 2008; Madianou et Miller 2011). Toutefois, ces mêmes outils, tout en facilitant la création de réseaux de soutien, sont également des canaux de négociation des relations sociale, à l'instar de plus anciens moyens de communication à distance (Mahler 2001). Ces dimensions ambivalentes de l'usage des TIC sont abordées dans la prochaine section.

Ethnographie en milieux numériques: entre l'autonomie et la surveillance

Parmi mes interlocuteur·ice·s, les plateformes en ligne sont largement consultées et circulent fréquemment comme sources de référence pour éclaircir les questions quotidiennes, notamment administratives, en Suisse. Sur ces plateformes publiques que nous visitons avec Farzanah, les administrateur·ice·s postent plusieurs publications par jour circulant des nouvelles suisses traduites de l'allemand ou du français vers le persan. Farzanah et d'autres *followers* persanophones commentaient les postes et les questions-réponses. Lorsque le Parlement suisse a débattu des conditions pour octroyer exceptionnellement un permis de voyage aux personnes détenant un permis provisoire, à part le bouche à oreille et le soutien du personnel de l'assistance sociale souvent débordé, ces groupes sur Instagram et Facebook destinés aux Afghan·e·s et persanophones habitant en Suisse sont devenus des plateformes alternatives de débrouillardise, permettant de surmonter les obstacles liés à l'accès et à la compréhension des informations officielles. Ali, un jeune Afghan résidant en Suisse alémanique, est administrateur d'un groupe en ligne populaire destiné à la communauté Afghane en Suisse, où il partage régulièrement des photos attrayantes et des descriptifs plaisants sur les coutumes helvétiques. Contrairement au groupe précédent que j'ai visité avec Farzanah, il poste peu de contenu lié aux démarches politiques et administratives. Lors d'un entretien, il m'explique que son objectif est de distraire ses *followers* de leurs soucis quotidiens. Il ajoute que son statut temporaire ne lui permet pas d'adopter un ton plus critique concernant les restrictions qu'il subit, tout comme une part importante des personnes issues de l'asile qui suivent sa page. Cet échange m'invite à dépasser une simple analyse des contenus publiés en ligne pour les considérer en relation avec les rapports sociopolitiques «hors ligne» et les contraintes structurelles qui façonnent leur production.

La littérature a présenté que les productions culturelles en ligne forgent les imaginaires à l'échelle transnationale, en diffusant les espoirs et désillusions des personnes migrantes en Europe (Souiah et al. 2018). Les travaux de Bolzman et al. (2017) sur les projets migra-

toires des migrant·e·s d'Afrique de l'Ouest en Europe montrent que les personnes vivant dans l'incertitude « communiquent rarement leurs difficultés et souffrances à ceux restés au pays » et se trouvent tourmentées par des sentiments de honte et de culpabilité (2017, 129). Dans ce contexte, la réflexivité en milieux numérique lors d'une recherche ethnographique nous invite à analyser ces pratiques à différentes échelles pour mieux les contextualiser. Par exemple, la détérioration de la situation en Afghanistan, exacerbée par le retrait soudain des troupes américaines et la prise du pouvoir par les Talibans en août 2021, a accru la pression ressentie par mes interlocuteur·ice·s à réussir leur migration. Les pratiques de connectivité sont en outre fragilisées par des infrastructures défaillantes et une situation politique délicate. Face à ces conditions difficiles, les stratégies de communication varient. Mohammad et Ali, par exemple, choisissent de limiter les discussions sur leurs défis en Suisse lorsqu'ils s'adressent à leur famille en Afghanistan. En revanche, Farzanah partage davantage ces aspects de sa vie avec sa sœur aînée. Ces exemples illustrent l'adaptabilité des pratiques de communication face aux infrastructures et situations politiques délicates.

Dans le cas de plusieurs interlocuteur·ice·s, la retenue à parler ouvertement ou non avec ses proches à distance ne s'explique pas uniquement par la volonté de les protéger d'une inquiétude supplémentaire. Elle est également façonnée par d'autres facteurs, tels que la crainte que leurs récits soient interceptés et mal interprétés. Cette retenue reflète les risques de surveillance perçus à plusieurs échelles. D'une part, certaines personnes craignent que les autorités suisses interceptent certaines communications et les interprètent de manière défavorable, potentiellement comme étant contradictoires avec un processus « d'intégration ». D'autre part, elles redoutent que des individus mal intentionnés en Afghanistan ou ailleurs, voyant leurs réussites migratoires sur les réseaux comme une opportunité, exploitent ces informations comme une source de revenus. Ainsi, le souci de protection et la méfiance à différentes échelles encadrent ces pratiques numériques dans ce contexte migratoire précaire.

Quel rôle joue l'ethnographie elle-même dans ces dynamiques ? Les représentations et les actions de l'anthropologue peuvent contribuer à renforcer ou à subvertir les dynamiques sociales, comme le souligne Alessandro Monsutti. La rencontre ethnographique « oscill(e) entre le don de soi et l'usage de l'autre » (2007, 25). Dans mon travail de terrain, cette dynamique s'est amplifiée par l'utilisation des TIC, notamment en accompagnant mes interlocuteur·ice·s à leurs rendez-vous administratifs et en discutant de leurs quotidiens « en ligne » et « hors ligne ». Dans ma relation avec Farzanah, les TIC étaient constitutifs à la relation ethnographique, afin de permettre l'échange sur la durée à distance. Par exemple, un coup de téléphone sur une plateforme de messagerie permettait à Farzanah de me contacter pour que je réalise une rapide traduction pour ses divers rendez-vous à la poste, à la pharmacie ou chez son opérateur mobile. Au niveau épistémologique, l'alerte de Farzanah mentionnée plus haut est donc heuristique : « Nous avons beaucoup de travail ». Cette remarque raisonne avec le double travail auquel notre rencontre contribue : pratiquement, régler ses tâches administratives, notamment liées à son accès aux TIC, et épistémologiquement, co-produire des connaissances sur les enjeux sociopolitiques liés à ces usages.

En s'incorporant à la palette de ressources mobilisée par les personnes participant à la recherche, l'ethnographe est également solicité·e pour ses capacités de médiation et de traduction. Ce type de rôle permet à l'observation participante de se produire, et à la réflexivité

en milieux numériques d'évoluer, entraînant une forme de positionnement plus engagé dans le champ de la construction de connaissance sur les TIC.

Conclusion

La réflexivité lors d'une ethnographie portant sur les dynamiques «en ligne» et «hors ligne» est essentielle pour comprendre l'usage des TIC dans des contextes migratoires. L'ethnographe peut envisager diverses méthodologies afin d'entrelacer ces espaces numériques et matériels. Pour de jeunes Afghan·e·s dans le système d'asile suisse, le statut précaire, l'injonction à «l'intégration», et la pression à réussir sa migration dans un cadre transnational sont clés pour comprendre les pratiques numériques.

Finalement, cette réflexivité invite à reconnaître les biais de l'ethnographe, qui ne partage pas nécessairement les mêmes expériences de précarité, de perception des échelles pertinentes ou d'accès aux TIC que ses interlocuteur·ice·s. La triangulation entre les données «en ligne», «hors ligne» et les récits et pratiques des participant·e·s permet de développer une compréhension plus située et contextualisée des usages des TIC face à des mécanismes d'autonomisation et de surveillance. Cette réflexivité permet à l'ethnographe de mettre en lumière les relations de pouvoir qui se manifestent en milieux numériques, que les TIC, comme l'ethnographie elle-même, contribuent à renforcer ou à subvertir.

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VIOLENCES DE MASSE, AUTOCENSURE ET WEB DIASPORIQUE

Quand l'enquête de terrain nous confronte à la question du positionnement en ligne

Léo Maillet

Résumé

Le fait d'enquêter auprès de populations confrontées à des violences de masse, *a fortiori* lorsque ces dernières sont commises en situation coloniale, soulève des enjeux éthiques et méthodologiques qui nécessitent de faire preuve de réflexivité. À partir de l'enquête de terrain que j'ai réalisée auprès de la diaspora ouïghoure d'Istanbul entre 2021 et 2023 dans le cadre de ma thèse de doctorat sur la boulangerie ouïghoure, je propose d'interroger ces enjeux en me concentrant sur la question des représentations. Dans le cadre de cet article, je montre comment les personnes que j'ai rencontrées sur le terrain m'ont non-seulement confronté à la question des représentations que je produis en tant que chercheur, mais aussi à celle de mon propre positionnement en ligne vis-à-vis des violences de masse auxquelles elles sont confrontées dans leur localité d'origine.

Mots clés : *Ouighours*, *diaspora*, *violence de masse*, *Turkestan oriental*, *positionnement en ligne*, *boulangerie*

MASS VIOLENCE, SELF-CENSORSHIP AND THE DIASPORIC WEB: WHEN THE FIELD INVESTIGATION CONFRONTS US WITH THE QUESTION OF ONLINE POSITIONING

Abstract

Conducting research among populations affected by mass violence, especially when such violence takes place in colonial contexts, raises ethical and methodological challenges that require reflexivity. Drawing on fieldwork conducted among the Uyghur diaspora of Istanbul between 2021 and 2023 for my PhD on Uyghur bread-making, I propose to address these challenges by examining the question of representation. In this article, I show how the people I met in the field confronted me not only with the issue of the representations I produce, as a researcher, but also with my own online positioning regarding the mass violence they are facing in their homeland.

Keywords: *Uyghurs*, *diaspora*, *mass violence*, *East Turkestan*, *online positioning*, *bread-making*

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Il est environ 08h00 quand nous prenons la première pause de la journée après avoir terminé une fournée de naans blancs (*aq nan*) qui trônent maintenant sur les étagères de la boulangerie. Le maître-boulanger (*naway usta*) attrape un naan encore chaud et le rompt en plusieurs morceaux qu'il nous distribue, à l'apprenti et à moi, alors que nous buvons les premières gorgées de thé noir qui accompagnent notre petit déjeuner quotidien. Pendant que nous mangeons, le maître écoute des messages vocaux sur WhatsApp et fait défiler le fil d'actualités de son profil Facebook.

En plus d'utiliser leur smartphone pour s'informer sur la situation au pays (*weten*) et dans le reste du monde, les boulanger·ère·x·s ouïghour·e·x·s[1] d'Istanbul s'en servent aussi pour lutter contre la monotonie du travail en regardant des vidéos, des reportages et des séries, ou en écoutant de la musique, des émissions de radio, des sermons religieux ou des livres audios. Pendant les deux mois que j'ai passés à travailler en tant qu'apprenti (*shagért*) dans cette boulangerie ouïghoure d'Istanbul, j'ai été frappé par l'importance accordée à l'utilisation du smartphone sur le lieu de travail. Cet apprentissage a été effectué dans le cadre de ma thèse de doctorat en études chinoises et politiques qui porte sur les dimensions sociopolitiques de la pratique et de la transmission de la boulangerie ouïghoure au Turkestan oriental/Région autonome ouïghoure du Xinjiang[2].

Dans le cadre de cet article, je propose de montrer en quoi les questions liées aux violences de masse, aux représentations des Ouïghour·e·x·s véhiculées par les autorités chinoises et à l'impact psychologique qu'elles ont sur les personnes concernées font partie intégrante de leur « problématique diasporique » (Trémon 2012). À partir de situations ethnographiques tirées des cinq mois d'enquête, dont deux mois d'apprentissage, que j'ai réalisés auprès des boulangères et boulangers ouïghour·e·x·s d'Istanbul entre 2021 et 2023, je vais tenter d'esquisser des pistes de réflexion sur la question du positionnement en ligne en tant que chercheur enquêtant auprès d'une diaspora confrontée à des violences de masse dans sa localité d'origine[3]. Pour reprendre la formule de Didier Fassin, la réflexivité que je vais essayer de mettre en place dans cet article ne cherche « [...] pas à poser un regard sur l'expérience intime de l'ethnographe pour en décrire les états d'âme, mais vise avant tout à mieux comprendre celles et ceux dont nous parlons » (Fassin et Bensa 2008, 9).

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[1] Les Ouïghour·e·x·s sont un peuple turcique majoritairement musulman vivant dans une région officiellement dénommée la « Région autonome ouïghoure du Xinjiang » (Chin. : *Xinjiang weiwu'er zizhiqu*), mais qu'un grand nombre d'Ouïghour·e·x·s préfèrent appeler le Turkestan oriental (Ouï. *Sherqiy türkistan*). Cette région se situe dans le nord-ouest de la République populaire de Chine (RPC), qui l'a annexée en octobre 1949 et y a mis en place des politiques relevant du colonialisme de peuplement et d'extraction. Pour une histoire générale de cette région, voir entre autres : Millward 2021.

[2] Cette thèse est réalisée en cotutelle entre l'Université de Genève et l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) de Paris, avec le soutien financier du Fonds national suisse pour la recherche scientifique. Elle repose sur une enquête de terrain d'une durée totale de sept mois répartis entre trois villes de Chine intérieure et Istanbul, en Turquie, combinée à l'analyse de sources textuelles et audio-visuelles en langues ouïghoure, turque et chinoise.

[3] J'aimerais remercier Dr Dilnur Reyhan (Inalco), Dr. Esther Leemann (UZH) et Dr. Eda Elif Tibet (Unibe) pour leur précieux conseils et commentaires sur les enjeux d'éthique et de réflexivité liés au contexte dans lequel j'ai effectué cette recherche. Merci aussi aux deux collègues anonymes qui ont relu cet article et m'ont permis d'approfondir sa portée théorique.

Violences de masse et web diasporique

Lors de la pause matinale dont chacun profite pour consulter les réseaux sociaux, le maître-boulanger s'approche de moi pour me montrer une vidéo qu'il vient de recevoir via un groupe WhatsApp. Il s'agit d'une vidéo prise en mode capture d'écran montrant le contenu d'une conversation de groupe sur l'application chinoise de messagerie WeChat (Chin. *weixin*) au début du mois de septembre 2022. La conversation en question est celle d'un groupe de résident·e·x·s de la ville de Ghulja qui compte 120 membres. Dans plusieurs messages vocaux et vidéos, une résidente alerte les autorités locales sur la situation critique de ses enfants qui n'ont pas mangé depuis plusieurs jours et gisent inconscient·e·x·s chez elle. En réponse à ses plaintes, elle reçoit un message texte rédigé en ouïghour par l'une des personnes référentes des autorités locales de son quartier : « Ceci n'est pas quelque chose qui arrive seulement à notre rue, c'est quelque chose qui arrive à toute la population de la ville de Ghulja, le plus gros est derrière nous, persévérons[4] ».

Dans les vidéos envoyées par la résidente alertant sur la situation de sa famille, on voit une femme, un homme et trois enfants allongé·e·x·s dans la même pièce d'un appartement et vraisemblablement inconscient·e·x·s. Pendant qu'elle les filme, leur mère s'écrie d'un ton paniqué : « Ce ne sont pas des pierres, pas des pierres ! Ce sont des humains ! [...] Mon enfant va mourir ! Les enfants de mon enfant vont mourir[5] ! ». Une fois la vidéo terminée, le maître-boulanger me montre une autre vidéo dans laquelle un père de famille, lui-aussi résident de Ghulja, filme l'intérieur vide de son réfrigérateur ainsi que ses enfants assis devant une table vide, en s'exclamant d'un ton désespéré que sa famille n'a rien mangé depuis trois jours. Comme la femme de la vidéo précédente, cet homme s'adresse aux cadres (*kadir*) du bureau du Parti communiste chinois (PCC) de son district afin de les alerter sur la situation de sa famille qui est en train de mourir de faim. Après celle-ci, l'artisan me montre une troisième vidéo dans laquelle on voit une femme se suicider en sautant de son immeuble sous les cris lancinants de ses voisin·e·x·s. Une fois les vidéos terminées, le maître-boulanger commente en soupirant : « Il y a beaucoup d'oppression au pays... » (*wetende köp zulum bar*).

Comme les autres membres de la diaspora ouïghoure, il assiste via les réseaux sociaux au déroulement de la famine qui frappe la ville de Ghulja entre les mois d'août et de septembre 2022. Suite à l'application d'un confinement total dans le cadre de la politique chinoise du « zéro covid », le verrouillage depuis l'extérieur d'un grand nombre de logements combiné à des ruptures d'approvisionnement en nourriture ont conduit au décès d'un nombre inconnu de personnes (Al-Jazeera 2022). Selon les témoignages recueillis par le service ouïghour de Radio Free Asia, 22 personnes seraient décédées en un seul jour dans la ville de Ghulja (Hoshur 2022a). La famine a suscité des révoltes rassemblant plusieurs centaines de personnes, dont 617 ont été arrêtées et placées en détention pour avoir manifesté publiquement leur mécontentement dans les rues de leur quartier (Hoshur 2022b).

Depuis 2016, les Ouïghour·e·x·s ont connu une augmentation exponentielle du niveau de répression policière et militaire dans leur région, avec la mise en place de politiques d'incar-

[4] Ouï. : *Bu bizning kochighila kelgen ish emes, pütün ghulja sheher xelqige kelgen ish, jiqi tügep ézi qaldi, gheyret qilayli.*

[5] Ouï. : *Mawular tash emes, tash emes ! Adem ! [...] Mawu balam ölep kétidu ! Mawu balamning balisi ölep kétidu !*

cération de masse, de rééducation politique, de travail forcé, de prévention des naissances et de sinisation de la société ouïghoure (Smith Finley 2020 ; Zenz 2019 ; Clarke 2022 ; Byler, Franceschini, et Loubere 2022). Depuis 2019, ces violences de masses sont qualifiées de génocidaires par un nombre croissant d'universitaires ouïghour·e·x·s et de spécialistes de la région ou de la jurisprudence internationale en matière de génocide et de crimes contre l'humanité (Rosenberg et Zenz 2021 ; Hart 2022 ; Tobin 2022 ; Smith Finley 2020 ; Ala 2021 ; Reyhan 2021).

L'impact des violences de masse sur la diaspora et la question des représentations

Comme la plupart des autres commerçant·e·x·s ouïghour·e·x·s du quartier, les propriétaires de la boulangerie où j'ai effectué mon apprentissage s'informent quotidiennement sur la situation au pays et entretiennent un réseau de connaissances et de sociabilités majoritairement ancrées dans le « web diasporique ouïghour » (Reyhan 2017). Du fait de l'interdiction d'utiliser en Chine la plupart des applications de messagerie et les réseaux sociaux étrangers, seule l'utilisation d'applications chinoises permet de rester en contact avec la famille restée au pays. Néanmoins, c'est uniquement le cas lorsque celle-ci est encore autorisée à le faire, le début de la campagne d'internement de masse à la fin de l'année 2016 ayant amplifié un processus de rupture contrainte des liens numériques entre les familles ouïghoures et leurs proches résidant à l'étranger (Ala 2021, 5).

Pour la diaspora ouïghoure, les informations et les images fuitant de la région depuis 2016 sont extrêmement difficiles à supporter et s'ajoutent au « trauma colonial » (Lazali 2018) qui affecte déjà cette population (Ala 2021, 17-19). Dans un tel contexte, ne pas pouvoir prendre des nouvelles de ses proches et rester dans l'incertitude totale vis-à-vis de leur état de santé est une cause importante de dépression et de troubles psychologiques alimentés par la culpabilité, la honte et le sentiment d'impuissance (Ala 2021, 32-35, 65-66). Par empathie, j'ai ressenti le poids que cette forme particulière de « quotidien traumatique » (Kidron 2009) faisait porter aux propriétaires de la boulangerie ainsi qu'aux autres personnes ouïghoures que je rencontrais. Ce faisant, je me suis mis à ressentir un mélange de culpabilité, de honte et de sentiment d'impuissance reconfigurant « les frontières considérées comme allant de soi entre ce que signifie être sur le terrain et être chez soi » (Sepulveda Sanchez et al. 2021, 24).

D'autre part, les accusations de terrorisme régulièrement formulées à l'encontre des ouïghour·e·x·s de la diaspora constituent un stigmate qui a pour effet de dépolitiser toute forme de dénonciation et de lutte contre les violences de masse perpétrées par les autorités chinoises à l'encontre du peuple ouïghour (Roberts 2020 ; Rodríguez-Merino 2023). Parallèlement à ces accusations, les autorités chinoises ont mis en place des politiques de surveillance, d'intimidation et parfois d'agressions physiques et d'extradition forcées vis-à-vis des membres de la diaspora ouïghoure dans le monde entier (Jardine, Lemon et Hall 2021). Pendant mon enquête à Istanbul, la plupart de mes rencontres ont été marquées par deux questions qui revenaient régulièrement au moment des présentations : « Que pensez-vous des Ouïghour·e·x·s ? » (*uyghurlargha qandaq qaraysiz?*) ; « Selon vous, est-ce que les

Ouïghour·e·x·s sont des terroristes ?» (*sizge nispeten uyghurlar térrorchi mu ?*). Au début, je répondais à ces questions assez rapidement en disant que j'adorais la musique, la littérature et la cuisine ouïghoures et que je pensais qu'aucun peuple ne pouvait être qualifié de terroriste. Comprenant peu à peu que mes réponses étaient trop courtes et naïves au regard de la situation, je me suis mis à élaborer au fil des rencontres en donnant une version plus complète de mon opinion, à savoir que le peuple ouïghour est confronté à une «colonisation» (*mustemlikichilik*) par la RPC et que les politiques mises en place à partir de 2017 sont des politiques génocidaires (*irqiy qirghinchiliqiy siyasetler*).

Pour autant, le fait que je prenne position en privé, sans avoir de profil sur les réseaux sociaux ni d'interviews ou de publications pour témoigner de mon positionnement, laissait planer un doute. Étais-je bien venu à Istanbul pour y faire ce que je disais être en train de faire ? Quelles seraient mes prises de position publiques sur la situation dans leur région d'origine ? Mes recherches allaient-elles contribuer à renforcer le stigmate véhiculé par les autorités chinoises selon lequel la diaspora ouïghoure est principalement composée de terroristes ? À l'instar d'un grand nombre de chercheur·euse·x·s travaillant sur la situation contemporaine en RPC, exprimer mon positionnement publiquement pouvait mettre en danger les personnes avec qui j'étais entré en contact sur place et m'exposait au risque de ne plus pouvoir obtenir de visa pour y retourner (Erie, Joniak-Lüthi et Leibold 2020). En réaction, je me suis efforcé de ne pas apparaître en ligne avec des Ouïghour·e·x·s de la diaspora et à ne pas publier mes travaux afin de préserver mon anonymat le plus longtemps possible. Malgré ces efforts, une publication inattendue sur les réseaux sociaux a bousculé mes choix d'autocensure.

Quand le web diasporique communique avec l'enquête de terrain

Au cours d'une après-midi de travail à la boulangerie, une universitaire turque accompagnée d'un collègue ouïghour se présenta à la boutique pour acheter du naan. Comme j'étais en poste à la vente à ce moment-là, elle fut surprise de tomber sur un Européen travaillant dans une boulangerie ouïghoure et me demanda si elle pouvait me prendre en photo, ce que j'acceptais. Après un court échange au cours duquel je me suis présenté comme un doctorant en sciences sociales écrivant sa thèse sur la boulangerie ouïghoure, elle s'en alla. Le lendemain, je reçus plusieurs messages d'ami·e·x·s ouïghour·e·x·s me prévenant que quelqu'un avait publié la veille un post Facebook avec des photos de moi en train de travailler à la boulangerie. En moins d'une journée, le post avait recueilli plusieurs centaines de *likes* et des dizaines de commentaires. Ajouté à cela, un autre post décrivant mon profil et mon travail avait été publié par une amie ouïghoure qui avait vu cette publication et avait décidé d'y ajouter la sienne. Contactée par la journaliste ouïghoure Gulchehra Hoja, du service ouïghour du média en ligne Radio Free Asia, mon amie lui avait donné mon numéro de téléphone et je reçus dans la foulée une demande d'interview.

Comprenant qu'il était trop tard pour continuer d'essayer de préserver mon anonymat en ligne, je choisi d'accepter l'interview afin de pouvoir choisir les termes de ma (re)présentation. Je m'y suis donc présenté comme un chercheur en sciences sociales (*ijtima'i penler tetqiqatchi*) inscrit en doctorat à l'université de Genève sur le thème de la «culture ouïghoure

du naan » (*uyghur nan medeniyiti*) et de « la place du naan dans la vie sociale des Ouïghour·e·x·s en migration »[6] (*muhajirettiki uyghurlarning ijtima'i turmushidiki nanningorni*) (Gülchéhre 2022). Après cela, j'ai décidé de commencer à communiquer publiquement mes travaux sans éviter d'aborder explicitement la colonisation chinoise du Turkestan oriental et les violences génocidaires mises en place à l'encontre du peuple ouïghour depuis 2016.

Plutôt qu'un imprévu déstabilisant, cette situation s'est finalement avérée être une injonction à la réflexivité et à la remise en question des mécanismes de silenciation induits par les menaces que font peser les autorités de la RPC sur les libertés académiques, en Chine comme à l'étranger (Thum et al. 2018). En tant que chercheur européen, je me trouve dans une situation de privilège et de pouvoir qui engage ma responsabilité. Situation de privilège car, à l'inverse des membres de la diaspora ouïghoure globale, le fait d'être citoyen européen me permet de jouir d'une importante liberté de circulation et de me rendre en RPC sans courir le risque d'être interné sur simple décision administrative. En cela, nos interactions sont révélatrices de « l'immoralité de notre régime moral global » (Monsutti 2018, 450). Quant à la question du pouvoir, elle réside dans mon rôle de chercheur, lequel me conduit à produire des représentations qui peuvent contribuer à renforcer les stigmates qui affectent les personnes avec lesquelles j'ai conduit mon enquête et ainsi à les maintenir dans une position de subalternité (Clifford et Marcus 2008 ; Fassin et Bensa 2008).

En me posant non seulement la question de leur représentation, mais aussi celle de ma propre représentation et de mes recherches, les personnes que j'ai rencontrées dans les boulangeries ouïghoures d'Istanbul m'ont mis face à cette double responsabilité : pouvoir répondre publiquement à la fois des représentations que je produis et de la position que j'occupe dans l'espace social dans lequel je les produis. Or, pour reprendre les mots d'Alban Bensa :

> *Occuper une place dans l'espace social étudié autorise et garantit les paroles qu'on vous adresse. Une telle opportunité n'est possible que si le chercheur accepte d'être intégré avec son projet scientifique à l'univers des colonisés qui combattent la colonisation. […] Le chercheur rejoint ainsi le mouvement à la fois réflexif et actif qui comprend le passé non seulement àpartir du présent mais aussi en fonction d'un avenir qui appelle l'abolition complète du dispositif colonial et ses séquelles* (Bensa, Goromoedo et Muckle 2015, 24-25).

Ainsi, ce concours de circonstances m'a permis d'occuper une place dans l'espace social de la diaspora ouïghoure globale et d'entamer un dialogue extrêmement enrichissant, tant en termes de réflexivité que de compréhension de mon sujet de recherche, avec l'un de ses principaux médias. Je suis donc reconnaissant envers la journaliste et autrice Gulchehra Hoja pour le dialogue qu'elle m'a permis d'entretenir avec elle et son audience. En définitive, c'est aussi ce dialogue qui donne du sens à l'expression « faire des recherches *avec* les Ouïghour·e·x·s de la diaspora ».

[6] Le choix d'employer le terme « migration » (*muhajiret*) s'explique par le fait qu'il s'agit du terme principalement employé par les personnes que j'ai rencontrées dans le cadre de mon enquête. Les usages et les implications de ce terme font l'objet d'une analyse approfondie dans le cadre de ma thèse.

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It combines anthropological and historical approaches, relying on the analysis of ethnographic materials and Uyghur, Chinese and Turkish sources collected during several fieldwork inquiries in Inner China (2017, 2019) and Türkiye (2021, 2022, 2023).

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INTERVIEW: AN INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE ON THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION WITHIN ACADEMIA AND BEYOND

Serjara Aleman, Federica Moretti, and Sara Wiederkehr

The following is the edited excerpt[1] of a dialogue recorded in the summer of 2023 between the three editors of this special feature and three experienced researchers: Prof. Susan Ossman, Dr. Eda Elif Tibet, and Dr. Nadine Wanono, who participated in a two-part CUSO module of the Swiss Graduate Program in Anthropology on Migration, Representation, and Reflexivity that the editors organized in 2020 and 2021. This interview is a follow-up of the conversations we initiated during the workshops, which constituted a florid ground to discuss past and present challenges in anthropology, as well as future developments of our anthropological practices.

Federica: We are very pleased to welcome you today. We continue an exchange that started three years ago. We want to talk about how research priorities and practices have changed throughout the last decades. How have experienced researchers been managing challenges throughout their careers and how they envision the future, drawing from the specific experience of each invited researcher: digital and audio-visual media, affective multimodalities and filmmaking, performance and the visual arts.

Sara: Thank you very much for being here. Susan, based on your work, could you discuss the methodological and epistemological implications of the concepts of representation and reflexivity on the issues of migration and diversity?

Susan: Thank you. I am really pleased to be here with you today. The *Moving Matter Travelling Workshop* (MMTW)[2] is a group of artists and scholars who are also serial migrants: they have all lived in several countries for fairly long periods—three or more years. The idea for this came from a previous ethnographic work that I had done over ten years, which was a much more, you would call it, traditional ethnographic study, very conceptual. I'm trying to get at questions of migration, not just from the idea that the migrant goes from one place to another or perhaps returns home, but to ask what happens when the migrant moves on, not to create an imaginary third space, kind of a Homi-Bhabha-esque sort of discussion of the late 20th century, but instead thinking about the notion of mobility diversity. In other words, how does movement shape our subjectivity and how would one study it? That previous work took so long because finding people required listening to many stories before you could see who a serial migrant was, as it's a narrative you're looking for. But out of that work

[1] The conversation lasted 90 minutes and is available here in the form of a podcast.

[2] https://movingmattersworkshops.ucr.edu, accessed January 26, 2025.

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came the concept of the serial migrant and mobility diversity and the desire to extend this project in a collective way. The MMTW grew out of the concept and the background in fieldwork. I asked writers, artists, scholars, and a very select group of people who are all serial migrants to comment on the book as one might at a standard book talk: "You read it, what did you think?" And from that, rather than asking them to speak about it, I said, "Well, please open up and perform something from your own experience". From this, I had the idea of forming the workshop with this core group, which grew as it moved along. In this sense, there is a representation that takes place in the book itself, a representation of these questions, of the dialogues that we've had that have been transcribed. But here again, we're talking about a different kind of re-presentation through performance, through the creation of visual artworks, and through participatory events that we then organized based on the collective serial migration that was put into the process with the MMTW. The workshop would be formed by all these people, who themselves brought a certain story to the workshop. The idea was to go from one place to another, create a site-specific project, and then each time move on again, perhaps including new people, new places, and react to them, only settling into the site for a week or two. This work including the months of preceding research, lead to creating this kind of experiment of collaborative collective action in the context of a *Collective Serial Migration*. Our work in the MMTW wasn't strictly aimed at responding to anthropological questions. It created a place where we could do intense auto-reflexive ethnography, but at the same time, it also aimed at presenting to different publics these ideas of multiple migrations and getting people to think about migration in terms of the places that we worked in, whether it was in the Mediterranean Museum in Amsterdam, at the Elder Piercer Museum, in Berlin at the Chapel of Reconciliation. Each of these places had its own articulation of themes of migration, but several kinds of references were coming out of each work, some of which were anthropological, and we could come back to them. It was slightly different in each case because the public conceived differently according to the places we went to. That was part of our migration experience together. In a sense, there's an applied anthropological project within that because, in each place, we had to understand where we were and conceptualize it and remake our field. But then, there's the second-order field, which is our movement, and those two things are going on simultaneously.

Sara: Nadine, you told us that you weren't at ease with the limits between the distinctions we were making between fields and between visual and digital forms. I invite you to discuss this with us here in the light of these implications in your work.

Nadine: Thank you for inviting me. Thank you for your confidence. I will try to give you a quick answer about the epistemological and methodological dimensions of my work. In 2000, when I was in the [United] States, I started to deconstruct the ethnographic film and introduce the idea of process: not producing a film but having the right to present the process of research. That was quite complicated because it was a way of criticizing my own discipline, and it was self-reflexive and not very welcome. As a researcher, you are supposed to be specialized and fight for the rules, but, in fact, for me, the rules were obviously not good, and I thought that we must change them. Following that idea, I started to set up an event called *singular narrativity* and decided to do it outside of the academy. At that time, I chose the Cube, the first digital arts center specialized in the digital in France. It was the best place

for me because at that time, I thought that the digital could be a way to freely express myself. During my stay at the University of Santa Barbara, I worked quite a lot in the art department and with the programming department with Marcos Novak and George Legrady. It was a way of changing the support, changing the view. But, in fact, capitalism is capitalism, and we have been absorbed at some point, and the digital, as you see now, is part of the system. And we had to find a new way of creating something. Since this experience, even if it's time-consuming, as it's a slow process, we started to quit the Cube and set up an event manifestation in *le point éphémère* in Paris. We introduced performance as a way of interacting with people. In 2018, we selected a film made by a US film-maker. Instead of selecting her to present her film, we invited the subject of her film, Abdul, a migrant who came from Afghanistan to Greece, where he attended dance workshops. After a few days with him, we asked if he could perform during our event. During the performance, he went out of the frame, told his story, and interacted with people. Now, we are more and more focusing on the process, on what Deleuze and Guattari called *unarchive,* with Erin Manning, and it's how to produce minor gestures and how to give value or provide a space of expression for these minor gestures, which are quite meaningful, especially in terms of subjectivity and migration. In 2018, we invited a psychologist who introduced dance to migrant women and presented during our event. After that, I followed her workshop in Paris to share the life of these migrant women. The simplicity of it was very moving because she just danced, and she went round and touched the hands of the people from time to time. And just by this very small gesture, you connected with the group and with an individual. With this experience, we started to say, "OK, we will definitely forget film and the digital, and we will focus more on performance and participation". For a year, we have been working with ten people for the next manifestation or collaboration, which will be organized in Strasbourg. It's like breaking more and more, not the constraint, but the frame—and especially the political frame, directly interacting with the people and out of control, except that we are still looking for funding. We are still part of the big system but far away from the academic and art centers. We are working in the forest or we are working on an island close to nature to be able to be part of the whole system. It may be utopic; it's probably not a political statement, but it's more of a research lab or a life lab, and we are working and researching at the same time and producing new ways of expression.

Federica: We would like to invite the three of you to elaborate on the politics of representation involved in your work as fieldworker, writer or research designer. And for Eda, who just joined us, also to discuss the methodological and epistemological implications in the light of affective multimodalities and film-making.

Nadine: I think that perceiving yourself as a professional is something that I can already contest. I am more of a practitioner, and I am a researcher trying to find a solution. The way we ask questions allows us to have good answers. It is how we represent, and maybe now also how we try not to represent. We are on the way to perform together—I say "we" because it's a collective dimension. We try to erase or break the position between spectators and the producers of the spectacle. We are now on the same level and trying to interact together. This interaction is already some kind of improvisation, which is not at ease with the system, because the system asks you to have the answers before asking the question and to validate it. It's all about this position of questioning the system, how we are supposed to produce at

the beginning, how we can refuse to produce that way, and the way we are challenging the production, that is already a political dimension.

Eda: Speaking about transition and mobility, representation matters a lot and needs be done justly. Unfortunately, the one with access to funding and institutional support often decides how a story is to be told and how the so-called other is to be represented. I find that very troubling, and I think that's exactly where it needs a lot of transformation, a lot of revolution even today in this 21st century. Specifically talking about mobile people, there's a lot of injustice in terms of representation. I realized that when I started anthropology as a Master's student at the University of Kent in 2009, I was reading and seeing all these examples of how the anthropologists really had the sole power in the way they wanted to tell the story, even if there was a bit of an attempt to call it participatory—but it wasn't really. Participation or co-creation means there should be a lot of say, it should mean sharing power. Sharing and distributing power means that one needs to be recognized as an equal shareholder of whatever the product is about, be it a paper, a book, a film, an intervention, a multimodal or audio-visual intervention or a podcast. It should be done in collaboration with the people being represented; it cannot be done on their behalf, or it can't be done to them. Unfortunately, these are still common practices in the field, not only in anthropology. I also see it in migration and refugee studies, which is why I never wanted to position myself in migration studies. I found the act of working on, working about, and not working with the people being represented very dehumanizing. My revelation was to say from the beginning that we share equal narrative powers, and the anthropologist is there as a mediator, not as an authority, as "I know better than you because I read more theory than you". Theory must represent the field; theory must come from the field. When theory comes from the top down, that's epistemological violence, and one must be very honest about it. One should also be able to choose the theoreticians and the authors they feel closer to. Who are those people? One needs to look into postcolonial literature, at people who actually have a first-hand account of discrimination, racial injustice, and segregation; one needs to read the people who are going through the crisis, going through the injustices themselves. One cannot read a white author thinking they know best what participatory anthropology is. I think in Western scholarship, we're often told to play the game, that this and that author is the best, and we should follow them. No, we should not do that. People who inspired me most are rather revolutionary and transformative authors like bell hooks, Gayatri Spivak, Homi J. Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, and Paulo Freire. There are also people who are speaking just as wisely in the field but who have probably never published a book or a paper. Does this make them less worthy? No, because they have *the* life story. Affective multimodalities come as fighting what was not OK for a Turkish scholar trying to conduct a PhD in Switzerland with very traditional [academic] mindsets. Affection is very important in the field of representation. To overcome those wrong practices, one needs to equally share and distribute power, which comes with the recognition of co-authorship. That's all been the stance of my work; every film I did was always co-directed with the people being represented, and I think that gave them agency and the ability to transform their lives. My life has also changed.[3]

[3] To know more about the film, affection, and transformation, see https://www.karmamotion.com/ballad-for-syria (accessed February 22, 2025).

Federica: Nadine and Eda talked about representation not only in relation to the people with whom we work but also to us as anthropologists or human beings vis-à-vis institutions, our colleagues, and funding bodies. I think this is very interesting because the politics of representation is not only about how we talk or work with people but also how we represent ourselves and how we change the representation of our discipline.

Eda: Humanities is a system of thought, but it's up to the individuals to make their contributions. However, if it's about hierarchical positioning, then yes, often, a lot goes unsaid because these institutions are heavily power-charged. There are always those with the highest access to the grants. Usually, the professors have the last say in setting the agenda or the discourse. This should not be happening itself. Representation to me means that one needs to do this inner work within these institutions. That inner work should start from the top, but it never does because on the way to getting to the top something goes wrong. How am I just, regardless of the fierce competition in these institutions? Often, funding bodies find competition necessary for innovation and ground-breaking work. I don't agree with that. Some level of healthy competition can motivate one another, but if there's too much competition in a place, there's no innovation: there's just oppression. It's a vicious cycle; it's a capitalist economy, it's a neoliberal mindset. So, what can the institutions do to free themselves from these oppressive structures?

Serjara: Eda, you just talked about the necessity of sharing power. Could you give us an example of how this might be possible? How can you align the various interests and aims of people we encounter during fieldwork?

Eda: I think sharing first a common vision with the people in the field. Why are you there together, forming an alliance, building a coalition, being part of a meaningful cause? I speak as an activist anthropologist, so this is only one way of seeing life. As activists we unite for a cause to overcome the situation. This comes with genuine interest, integrity, affect to the cause, to the people, and asking "What can I do for you? How is this relationship not just about my career, but how can I distribute the privilege I have? How can I support you in accessing points of privilege and power?" And this is possible through true friendships establishing mutual understandings. People in the field understand if the person has exploitative intentions. Then they do not contribute to studies, which is why you lack a lot of spirit in so many studies because you see they're very transactional.

Susan: I guess at this point, I should pick up on some of the strands in the conversation. One thing to bring into this is the notion of practice. Nadine brought that up, and Eda also touches on that in her question of collaboration. I have an individual practice of making things. I make actual objects, and some of these objects are things that I could not make with anyone else. There are certain things that I make by myself in a solitary place and certain aspects of ethnography benefit from this self-reflexivity. Although I do collaborative work, in the MMTW, we also punctuate this collaborative work with individual or smaller group work. The notion of the collective is always there, these shared questions, but at the same time, there's a kind of "moment work" as they speak about in, for instance, tectonic theatre, where some of it benefits from not always having the same aims. The values of the art world and the academic world are quite different, but by confronting those or working simultaneously with those, either in our individual work or collectively, we do find some of those points

that we're seeking in some kind of wiggle room among disciplines and institutions. Within the MMTW group, there are people with different economic and institutional resources, and the places where we work are very different. So, we collectivize our resources. That's one aspect of it. And in terms of representation, several different kinds of representation are going on, and I think it's from that multiplicity that some of the possibilities arise.

Serjara: Thank you Eda, Susan, and Nadine for these very inspiring reflections. What do you think are current challenges of our discipline in different contexts, like Switzerland, Turkey, the French-speaking and the Anglo-Saxon worlds, specifically as a woman anthropologist? How do you see the future?

Eda: In my situation, someone who's always been educated in the West but has ties to the Middle East and the transforming country that is Turkey, our biggest challenge as a young female academic has always been patriarchy and authoritarianism. So, how do you conduct science under such circumstances? Which is the reason why people might be migrating toward the West. However, when you arrive in the West as a scholar, people may see this as a weakness and try to use it against you. But not everybody. There's also a decolonial mindset, people who want to work with you because they see your potential or talent. But then there are also those who want to abuse that and want to kind of enslave you. I've seen both extremes. I've seen incredible support in my life also coming from spaces of white privilege. But I've also seen incredible oppression in Switzerland, even sometimes more than back home in Turkey. I learned to dwell in the unknown and the precarity of never knowing whom you'll get to meet. I'm very passionate about these practices of building coalitions and alliances. I've started a new advanced post-doc position at a leading science institute called Wyss Academy with a very decolonial systems-change approach. It's promising to me that somehow my background is needed today, this critical voice that doesn't shy away from not being honest in the name of the power game. It was a risk-ful journey. I was always at the edge, but I think challenges and hardships also push us to be more creative, more innovative, and one should never give up. It's a long journey, regardless of your background. But I am still here because the more Erdoğan strikes back home, the more Elif must strike. That's been my motivation, but it's been very challenging. I've found my creative ways and a lot of solidarity on the way. So, yes, challenges, hardships, I see them, I feel them, I experience them, but I somehow also find them inspiring.

Serjara: There is this discourse about the PhD as a journey of normalized suffering and hardship. Many people shy away from this because we don't want to suffer. How can we get more joy into the everyday of academic work?

Eda: I think there needs to be some serious political regulation around the ecosystem of the university. One can do that, but one will have to take risks. I think that's why people are suffering because they are mostly risk averse. Paulo Freire always said that liberating the oppressed starts by liberating the oppressor. If one day a PhD student comes and says, "Well, professor, I don't need you to supervise me anymore, I don't need to do the PhD with you", no oppressed, no oppressor, but the PhD remains. That's a very interesting question for me, to fight back. I wish it didn't have to be this way, but unfortunately, it is normalized that the PhD must suffer, go through serious mental disorders, and survive. It should be unacceptable. This is not science; this is brutality, because you use people's weaknesses, and this

comes from the "excellence culture", the 1% deciding over the 99%. We need more of a systemic intervention, and we need to work through this in very intelligent ways. We need to come up with ideas and solutions so that this is no longer normalized.

Susan: I've never really believed in *the* discipline, and I wonder if I'm the best representative of Anglo-anything. I will pick up on some of the other things that were brought up. I've worked across many disciplines and I've taught many different disciplines in different languages in different places; that's part of the whole serial migrant story in my case. This question of risk is important. If you have a taste for risk, you don't suffer as much. And I think that you have to, given the difficult institutional situation in universities, as Nadine brought up at the very beginning, unless you find great joy and pleasure—and I do not mean that in an uneasy way. You know that the difficulties of that pleasure and joy are real; those challenges of getting through the work, whatever it is, are real. But why go through all that institutional hassle if you are not already finding great joy in your work? This question of suffering, I don't know where it's coming from. I don't know that all students suffer. I didn't. I enjoyed doing my PhD. It may be that certain conditions are making it more difficult to enjoy that process, and enjoying it is something that I think is fundamental to being able to do this kind of work. One thing that can be set very early on in our graduate school education is how you relate to your own self, the disciplines, the routines, the relationships, with others, both in terms of others who may be collaborating on a project and those you're interacting with either as references—those you'll never meet—or the people who we're having conversations with in different disciplinary realms. Those are things that can be encouraged by professors or colleagues or the people we meet in our collaborations with fieldwork. Thinking about those things early on can be really helpful. Just by the chance of my own story, which I tell a bit about in the book that I recently published, it meant that I was forced by conditions of employment of finding a job to take this sort of pleasure I had in ethnography and render it in both institutional and collaborative ways very early on and across disciplines. Seeking out those kinds of opportunities is something that is not typically part of what we professors tell you in graduate school. They're always talking about the discipline, how are you going to be a better anthropologist, how are you going to be a better artist, how are you going to be a better film-maker, how are you going to compete in that world? But I suggest seeking out all possibilities of thinking of either pluralities of disciplines or things like that.

Serjara: Another challenge might be the idea of anthropology as a vocational calling. This image of the ideal fieldworker and academic doesn't leave room for anything else if you want to excel. This idea of excellence is still expected from the institution or us, even if it's unsaid.

Susan: You're talking about the expectations, and then the reality is you get your PhD—if it's a good piece judged according to those criteria. The other thing is sometimes fieldwork impacts how you imagine your life outside of work. There's this mixture of work and life, sometimes requiring more. To have chosen to do fieldwork rather than some other kinds of research, for instance, will impact your relationships, whether you have children, your relationships with your partner or your family, whatever those things are. Each configuration

will be different. It might be a non-normative configuration that results, but that might not necessarily be a sacrifice; it might be a good thing in certain situations. There's no black-and-white answer to that. Life is risky, and there are all kinds of things that happen, even if you never do fieldwork. In certain senses, there are choices in creating a field that you have a role in creating.

Nadine: It's very interesting to be able to share these testimonies with Eda and Susan. Maybe the challenge on my side is the transmission of values and way of life, and of trying to change the system. It's not easy, but it's a real "shift challenge". What Eda said: that facing challenges inspires you, it's very true for me. Challenges push you to find another solution. That's important. Also, for the young generation, when I am in the position of being a supervisor for a Master's, for example, it's to give the students the possibility to open new fields and to have interdisciplinary research, to challenge writing proposals, etc. It's to question the boundaries of the system and to open the space, and I think that each of us could do that and to be an activist by integrating more art as a means of expression in a PhD, for example. The fight started in 1975, and we are still fighting for having the right. Some students who have a PhD based on research art are not allowed to present the film. You must fight and defend the students and give them the arguments to do so. That's how I perceive what I am supposed to do now: transmitting values and being strong. When I became a mother for the first time, I was the first woman in my laboratory at the CNRS (Centre National de la, Recherche Scientifique); they didn't even look at me. They didn't recognize it—the belly did not exist. Physically and emotionally, it was a challenge. You have to take the freedom of being a mother, if you like, and not separate between your professional life and your family life. It's important to integrate the whole body and be a researcher, woman, and mother. It completely changes the relationship you have with the people. You are not a white woman without anybody with you, and I think it changed a lot for the people with whom I work, even in France, because you become a human being. We must have the right, and we must have the strength to stand for this position, even if the system is not really welcoming you. That's a challenge. Regarding the suffering during a PhD, I think it was not easy when I did mine, but I was not suffering. I think I perceived it as a ritual. The ritual of power. It was a way for me to understand the power and to see how, with a word used by Rouch, to *détourner.* There is no translation in English: it's to use the system to create something else on the side. For me, it was to use the system to get my freedom. And I always used the academy to pursue my work in the way I would like to do it. You are not working for recognition, but you are working for the transmission of values and the strength to fight for *le détournement.* That's part of my mantra.

Serjara: Do you think that in your position and with an established career, you now have the space to do this transmission of values and change the system?

Nadine: In fact, I created the space. By having challenges, you find inspiration. For me, it was to create a space. It's what I did collectively with what we call *digital anthropology.* It's been ten years and now we are creating this space to give young researchers the freedom to express themselves. Like two or three years ago in Berlin where Erin Manning worked a lot on "neurodiversity". That's a way of opening the doors and the possibility for the people to

be part of the academic system, express themselves, and hold a PhD. It's about welcoming the subjectivity of others. And when I say "others", it's me also. We are part of the others, we are part of the people, of what Deleuze called *le peuple qui manque,* "the one who is missing".

Serjara: Thank you so much. That was a lot of inspiration and food for thought. We invite you each to say a few concluding words.

Eda: I suppose I can say we all have limited time in this world, and I think we should serve for something bigger than our own life course and that I believe to be humanity. Humanities should really do justice to that vision. How does humanity come to its best self and reach its best potential? I think there's always hope, but one needs to be very honest about how we treat others, how we treat our colleagues and peers and how we form such structures and institutions. If we can have this mindfulness and awareness constantly, if everybody meditates a bit more than usual or if those who never did start doing it, I suppose that is already a way forward to a healthier academia.

Susan: This idea of creating space is something that certain trends in anthropology particularly help us to think about. Thinking about how to configure the field site, and how our desires in that space lead us to that otherness within ourselves that Nadine described as being part of a collective enterprise. That's something really promising within anthropological fieldwork design, which can seem very abstract and perhaps theoretical. And yet, if it's informed by research, attention, and experiential work in particular configurations, I think it can be very powerful and lead to things that are not necessarily only results for anthropology. When we think about those broader implications, whether it's for all humanity—or a bit more modest in certain circumstances, it has other kinds of good than just "Oh well, I've advanced the discipline" or "I have made my career". That's one area I think is particularly interesting to continue pursuing.

Nadine: It's very inspiring to be with you today because we are not alone and that's a very important feeling of saying that there are people working with the same spirit, the same strengths, and the same wish of changing the institution from the inside or from the outside. Even if Zoom is a typical new way of creating a space, we create small spaces of freedom like this, where we can express ourselves and share our project, share our work. Susan and Eda, it was meaningful for me to listen and see how you elaborate your work and what you have done. I think this comes from all of us, thank you. It's very important that you create this space, take the time to do it, even during a PhD. It means that you are not suffering too much, and you have the energy to open a space for us, so thank you.

Serjara: Yes, and thank you. That's a mutual feeling, because we wanted to create this space as our own and to feel that we are not alone, that we can seek out some support and confirmation for what we are doing.

Sara: This process over the last three years has been very inspiring for me, and I know for Serjara and Federica as well. You said it so beautifully Nadine—whatever we are doing, just do it with the whole body. And this is something that we can think about further because as young researchers we are creating ourselves at the same time as we are creating the space. Through the practices, theories, and conceptualizations we use for our analysis, we also position ourselves in the world, not just in the discipline. It's been beautiful and strengthening to have you here. Thank you for listening as well.

KUNST-BASIERTE METHODEN(-LEHRE) ALS PERFORMANCE IN DER ETHNOGRAPHIE, RESTITUTION, DIFFUSION

Monika Salzbrunn

Zusammenfassung

Trotz der Dringlichkeit, Reflexivität sowie innovative, kunst-basierte Methoden als Alternative zur Text-Zentriertheit der Wissenschaft im Allgemeinen und der Anthropologie im Besonderen zu entwickeln und zu fördern – als Mittel zur Datenerhebung und zur Verbreitung-, stoßen sich wunderbare, kreative Ansätze oft an institutionellen und wissenschaftspolitischen Hindernissen. In diesem Text werden gelungene Beispiele aus der aktuellen Forschungspraxis vorgestellt, welche in einem inter-generationellen Dialog über Reflexivität und die Darstellung von Migration mittels audio-visueller Ausdrucksmittel nachdenken: insbesondere Filme, Performances und graphische Werke.

Schlüsselwörter: *Kunst*, *Reflexivität*, *Performance*, *Migration*, *Film*, *Graphische Anthropologie*

ART-BASED (TEACHING) METHODS AS PERFORMANCE IN ETHNOGRAPHY, RESTITUTION, DISSEMINATION

Abstract

Despite the urgency of developing and promoting reflexivity and innovative, art-based methods as an alternative to the text-centredness of science in general and anthropology in particular – as a means of data collection and dissemination – wonderful, creative approaches often come up against institutional and science policy obstacles. This text presents successful examples from current research practice that discuss reflexivity and the representation of migration through audio-visual means of expression in an inter-generational dialogue: in particular films, performances, and graphic works.

Keywords: *art*, *reflexivity*, *performance*, *migration*, *film*, *graphic anthropology*

Viel ist geschrieben worden über die Dringlichkeit, Reflexivität sowie innovative, kunst-basierte Methoden als Alternative zur Text-Zentriertheit der Wissenschaft im Allgemeinen und der Anthropologie im Besonderen (Elliot und Culhane 2017; Schneider und Wright 2006) zu entwickeln und zu fördern – als Mittel zur Datenerhebung und zur Verbreitung –, aber in vielen Fällen stoßen sich wunderbare, kreative Ansätze an institutionellen und wissenschaftspolitischen Hindernissen: Nur an wenigen sozialwissenschaftlichen Master- oder

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Promotionsstudiengängen können Filme, Blogs oder graphische Werke als (von erläuternden Texten flankierte) Hauptbestandteile wissenschaftlicher Arbeiten[1] eingereicht werden. Oft ist es umgekehrt, d. h. (bewegte) Bilder dienen allenfalls als Illustration von Texten. Auch in der Forschung (und in Auswahlgremien) finden Filme, Comics oder Podcasts noch lange nicht die gleichberechtigte Anerkennung wie Aufsätze in bestimmten Fachzeitschriften – trotz konstruktiver Ansätze, etwa in der DORA-Erklärung[2]. Umso erfreulicher ist die Initiative von Serjara Aleman, Federica Moretti und Sara Wiederkehr, in einem inter-generationellen Dialog über Reflexivität und die Darstellung von Migration mittels audio-visueller Ausdrucksmittel nachzudenken und gelungene Beispiele aus der aktuellen Forschungspraxis vorzustellen[3].

Der Rückgriff auf Kunst-basierte Methoden sollte jedoch nicht erst in der Promotionsausbildung Anerkennung finden, sondern vom ersten Semester an einen festen Platz in der (idealiter immer forschungsgeleiteten) Methodenausbildung bekommen. Insbesondere in interdisziplinären Kontexten höre ich regelmäßig die einwendende, szientistisch geprägte Frage von Studierenden, „Ist das wissenschaftlich?", so dass offensichtlich noch ein weiter Weg zurückgelegt werden muss, bis Zeichnungen, Kurzfilme oder Performances als Seminararbeit als gleichberechtigt zu klassischen Essays angesehen werden – wenn sie in Verbindung mit einem Schriftstück, welches von der Reflexivität (Salzmann 2002) der Schöpfer:innen zeugt, vorgelegt werden. Manche Studierende brauchen Überwindung, um die ihnen dargebotene Freiheit tatsächlich zu nutzen und mit Tanz, Comics, Spielen oder Podcasts als legitimen Mitteln der empirischen Forschung, Darstellung und Verbreitung wissenschaftlicher Erkenntnisse zu experimentieren.

Dabei scheint, wenn einmal der Bann gebrochen wurde, offensichtlich, wie kreativ (und gelegentlich destabilisierend) der Rückgriff auf künstlerische Mittel in den Sozialwissenschaften sein kann:

Um den Begriff der Performativität multi-sensorisch fassen zu können, haben wir den Performer Antonio Caporilli eingeladen, mit MA-Studierenden die Wirkung körperlicher Präsenz im öffentlichen Raum im Rahmen von disruptiven Ereignissen zu erfahren. Antonio Caporilli hatte ich im Rahmen meiner Feldforschung in Genua als Teil meines ERC ARTIVISM[4] Projektes kennen gelernt und mit ihm diverse Performances im urbanen Raum

[1] Unter den Ausnahmen in der Schweiz sind die Lausanner Fakultät für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, die bereits über Filme und Blogs als Promotionsarbeiten verhandelt hat, das seit 2011 existierende Doktoratsprogramm SINTA zwischen der Universität Bern und der Hochschule der Künste Bern (Gartmann und Schäuble 2021) sowie die professionalisierenden Abschlüsse (mit einem Film oder einer Museumsarbeit) in der Neuenburger Anthropologie.

[2] DORA Declaration 2020: Rethinking Research Assessment. Ideas for Action. https://sfdora.org/2020/05/19/rethinking-research-assessment-ideas-for-action/.

[3] Ich danke den Herausgeberinnen dieses Special Issue Serjara Aleman, Federica Moretti und Sara Wiederkehr für die Einladung zu den CUSO Workshops Migration, Reflexivity and Representation I und II (2020, 2021) als *invited expert* zusammen mit Nadine Wanono, Susan Ossman, Eda Elif Tibet und Esther Leemann. Desweiteren danke ich Raphaela von Weichs für wichtige Kommentare zur ersten Version dieses Textes sowie Ana Laura Rodriguez Quinones, Lisa Zanetti, Blaise Strautmann sowie Stéphane Huber, Fabien Giller und François Foret für konstruktive Debatten zu Kunst-basierten Methoden.

[4] Das ERC ARTIVISM Projekt wurde vom Europäischen Forschungsrat finanziert, unter dem Programm Horizon 2020 Forschung und Innovation der Europäischen Union (ARTIVISM - Fördervereinbarung No. 681880), www.erc-artivism.ch (zuletzt eingesehen am 9. 8. 23).

durchgeführt. Diese komplexe Erfahrung des Aeffektes, d. h. des Effektes und Affektes (Duncombe und Lambert 2018) von Artivismus und die damit verbundene Verschiebung von Repräsentationen (dessen, wer diese Räume legitim und legal – ohne Ankündigung – bespielen darf) wollte ich an Studierende weitergeben. So wie in Neapel ein *Caffè sospeso* Unbekannte einlädt, einen anonym offerierten Kaffee zu genießen, haben wir auf dem Markplatz Renens Teil für Teil einen Tisch mit Stuhl, Kaffee, Keksen, Blumen und einem Notizheft aufgebaut, in spannender Erwartung, ob jemand die stumme Einladung annehmen würde. Tatsächlich haben sich kreative Menschen von der poetischen Störung des Raumes zu Gedichten und Aphorismen inspirieren lassen, festgeschrieben als Gegen-Gabe zu einem Moment des Innehaltens im städtischen Treiben. Es waren insbesondere Personen, die mit Bierdosen vor einem Supermarkt lagerten, die uns die komplexesten Ideen und Gedichte geschenkt haben – und dazu Anlass zum Nachdenken über die Repräsentation von Marginalität, Armut und geistigem Reichtum gaben. Nicht Migration oder äußere Zuschreibungen von Alterität stand im Fokus von Repräsentation in einer Kleinstadt, in der weniger als 50 Prozent der Einwohner:innen den Schweizerpass besitzen (und Diversität somit eine banale, alltägliche Erfahrung geworden ist), sondern die Frage von Stereotypen über das legitime Nutzen von Öffentlichkeit als Raum für Vergesellschaftungsprozesse. Dies ist jedoch nicht immer der Fall; denn Ethnograph:innen werden auch, wie Nina Khamsy (in dieser Ausgabe) in ihrem Aufsatz über ihre Forschung über Afghanen beschreibt, über ihre Herkunft, Sprachkompetenz, Geschlecht, Alter, Status und Zivilstand wahrgenommen und eingeordnet: historische Erfahrungen sowie Repräsentationen des persischen Sprach- und Kulturraumes spielen eine wichtige Rolle bei Khamsys Feldzugang als Schweizerin und Iranerin.

In einem Kooperationsprojekt *partenariat privilégié* mit der Freien Universität Brüssel haben wir mit Studierenden an konkreten, gemeinsam durchgeführten Feldforschungen diverse Kunstformen eingesetzt, um wiederum eine künstlerisch-politische Performance zu erkunden. Das Projekt ArtObOut *L'art comme objet et comme outil pour les sciences sociales* (Kunst als Objekt und Werkzeug für die Sozialwissenschaften) zielt darauf ab, die Wechselwirkungen zwischen den Künsten im Allgemeinen und insbesondere Bühnenkunst, Performance im öffentlichen Raum und anderen künstlerischen Ausdrucksformen, welche Performance und Politik vermischen (Comics, Murals etc.) und als Spektakel und/oder Ritual konzipiert sind, performativ gemeinsam (Salzbrunn 2021) zu erforschen. Die Reflexion ist dreifach. Zunächst geht es um Kunst als technisches Mittel zur Darstellung und Vermittlung von Forschung, mit der Studierende, aber auch ein Publikum, das weit über die Mauern der Universität hinausgeht, erreicht werden können. Zweitens werden künstlerische Ausdrucksformen zur Vermittlung sozialwissenschaftlicher Methoden eingesetzt. Beispielsweise ermöglicht die Beteiligung von Schauspielern und Schauspielerinnen in Lehrveranstaltungen den angehenden Forschern und Forscherinnen, sich in der Durchführung von Interviews und Beobachtungen, der Nutzung von Raum und Zeit, der Übernahme verschiedener sozialer Rollen und der Simulation von Situationen vor Ort zu perfektionieren. Auf wissenschaftlicher und epistemologischer Ebene schließlich ermöglicht die Reflexion, die Ähnlichkeiten und gemeinsamen Dynamiken zwischen Kunst und Politik sowie zwischen Kunst und Forschung zu konzeptualisieren. Auf diese Weise ermöglicht sie es, willkürliche Barrieren zwischen Wissensbereichen zu hinterfragen. Der theoretisierende Pro-

zess ist hierbei möglichst empiriegeleitet und ähnelt damit Eda Elif Tibets Standpunkt (im Interview in dieser Ausgabe): „Theory must represent the field; theory has to come from the field".

Nach einem vorbereitenden Seminar zu Ritualen und Karneval in unterschiedlichen Kontexten fand eine Exkursion zum *Carnaval Sauvage* in Brüssel statt, zu dem Studierende schließlich einen Kurzfilm produziert haben. Der „wilde Karneval" ist ein nicht angemeldeter Maskenzug, ausgehend von dem für soziale Errungenschaften und politischen Widerstand bekannte Viertel *Marolles,* durch die *beaux quartiers* bis hin zum Justizpalast führend. Jedes Mitglied der Gruppe aus Studierenden und Lehrenden hatte einen kosmopolitischen Hintergrund (durch mehrere Staatsbürgerschaften, Mehrsprachigkeit im Elternhaus und/oder transnationale Biographien). Die Repräsentationen dieser Aspekte spielte jedoch keine Rolle beim Feldzugang, sondern vielmehr die Vertrautheit mit alternativen Karnevalsmilieus und deren Semantik sowie die Nähe zu linken Aktivist:innen – zumal wir alle die meiste Zeit selbst kreierte Masken und Kostüme getragen haben (die den ästhetischen Codes alternativer Karnevals entsprachen).

Während (sowohl die eigene Maske als auch) die Kamera nicht nur ein Dokumentations- sondern auch ein (Zugehörigkeit repräsentierendes) Identifikations- und Kommunikationsmedium im Feld ist, wird das filmische Material zugleich Tagebuch, Resultat von ständigen Perspektivwechseln und Positionierungen sowie Clips für die Montage des wissenschaftlichen Endproduktes, welches gleichzeitig die Verbreitung an ein über das akademische Publikum herausgehendes Publikum ermöglicht (siehe auch den Beitrag von Howald in dieser Ausgabe). Idealiter – im Rahmen der konstruktiven Infragestellung von Machtpositionen und Hierarchien im Feld – wird dieser Prozess in Kooperation und ständigem Austausch mit den Akteur:innen im Feld beschritten. Wie Nadine Wanono (im Interview in dieser Ausgabe) sagt „We are now on the same line and trying to interact together".

Diese fundamentale Frage nach Feedback und Ko-Konstruktion von Bildern im Feld (Salzbrunn 2020) sowie am Schneidetisch hat die Durchführung des ERC ARTIVISM Projektes (Salzbrunn 2015) von Anfang an begleitet. Gemeinsam mit Raphaela von Weichs, Federica Moretti und Sara Wiederkehr wurden Kunst-basierte Forschungsmethoden in Kamerun, Kalifornien, Frankreich und Italien angewandt, weiterentwickelt und deren Ergebnisse auch im Rahmen von Tagungen der Schweizer Gesellschaft für Ethnologie unter ethischen (mit Anne Lavanchy, Valerio Simoni, Nadja Eggert) als auch performativen Aspekten (Baracchini 2022; Bloch 2022) diskutiert (siehe auch die Beiträge von Maillet und Khamsy zu ethischen Fragen in dieser Ausgabe). Comics, Zeichnungen, Fotos, Filme und Blogs ermöglichen es uns nicht nur, während des Forschungsprozesses Bilder zu ko-konstruieren, sondern die Ergebnisse dieses Prozesses auch zurück ins Feld zu bringen und gemeinsam am Schnitt von Filmen und am Verfassen von Texten zu arbeiten. Die hier filmisch, zeichnerisch und/oder textuell dargestellte Repräsentation von Alterität und/oder Migration sowie von individuellen und kollektiven Darstellungen (etwa im Kontext von politischem Engagement) wird hier auf eine herausfordernde (Zerreiss-)Probe gestellt. Dieser gemeinsame Prozess wiederum ist eine Form der Photo/Video/Text-Elicitation, da Unverständnis, Widerstände, Konflikte oder auch gemeinsame Lacher bedeutsame weitere Quellen im Feedback-Prozess darstellen, über die wiederum reflektiert werden muss. Diese Prozesse stellen zumindest situationsgebunden herkömmliche Hierarchien infrage. Beteili-

gungen, Zustimmungen können beispielsweise vertieft oder auch widerrufen werden. Susan Ossman (im Interview in dieser Ausgabe) unterstreicht ebenfalls die Bedeutung von individueller Selbst-Reflexion sowie von kollektiven Momenten der Reflexion in autonomen Räumen, die „as open as possible" sein sollten.

Jener kreative gemeinsame Prozess erlaubt auch, eine konstruktive Antwort auf die Forderung nach einem „Recht auf Repräsentation" (oder „nicht-Repräsentation") zu geben, von der Claudia Howald (in dieser Ausgabe) im Zusammenhang mit ihrer Forschung über die kolumbianische Jugend in Quibdó schreibt – wenngleich diese Kooperation eine autonome Repräsentation keinesfalls ersetzen kann oder will. Schließlich sind Ethnograph:innen selbst auch potentielle Quellen der Repräsentation, über die nicht nur Erzählungen kursieren, sondern auch Fotos, auf deren Zirkulation die Modelle keinerlei Einfluss haben. Die Analyse dieser Prozesse der Zirkulation von Repräsentation (der Ethnograph:innen) hat Maillet (in dieser Ausgabe) anschaulich in seinem Aufsatz über seine Rolle als Lehrling-Forscher in einer von Uiguren geführten Bäckerei in Istanbul beschrieben. Wenngleich es gute Gründe für eine vorübergehende Anonymität gab, zieht das unfreiwillige Outing als Doktorand nun interessante Folgen nach sich, die wiederum in die Reflexivität des Forschungsprozesses und der damit verbundenen wechselseitigen Rollen Eingang finden. Damit wurde dem Auflösungsprozess bzw. *uncovering* ungeplant vorgegriffen, der spätestens in der Restitutionsphase stattfindet.

In der Restitutionsphase der Ergebnisse des ERC ARTIVISM Projektes haben wir schließlich unsere Filme in jedem Feld gezeigt, sowie wichtige Kooperationspartner:innen, d. h. Aktivist:innen, Künstler:innen, Artivist:innen aus allen Feldern zu einer Abschlusstagung in Form von Workshops im urbanen Raum und zum Verfassen einer gemeinsamen multiformen kreativen Publikation eingeladen und dies auch filmisch dokumentiert[5]. Es bleibt jedoch zu fragen, ob Machtverhältnisse auch in diesem Moment sowie darüber hinaus verändert werden können: Über externe, intersektionell analysierte Zuschreibungen hinausgehend, ist die Frage der Autorität von akademisch situiertem Wissen nicht langfristig geklärt, sondern lässt sich zunächst über eine vertiefte Form der Reflexivität, auch und nicht zuletzt über das anthropologische Engagement (Larsen et al. 2021; Leresche 2022; siehe auch das Gespräch mit Tibet, Ossman und Wanono in dieser Ausgabe) durch Wissen(svermittlung), fortführen. Nicht nur Ethnographie ist Performance, sondern auch Restitution und Diffusion sind performativ. Vom ersten Semester an, mit Engagement, Reflexivität und Spaß.

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THE ASCONA CHARTER

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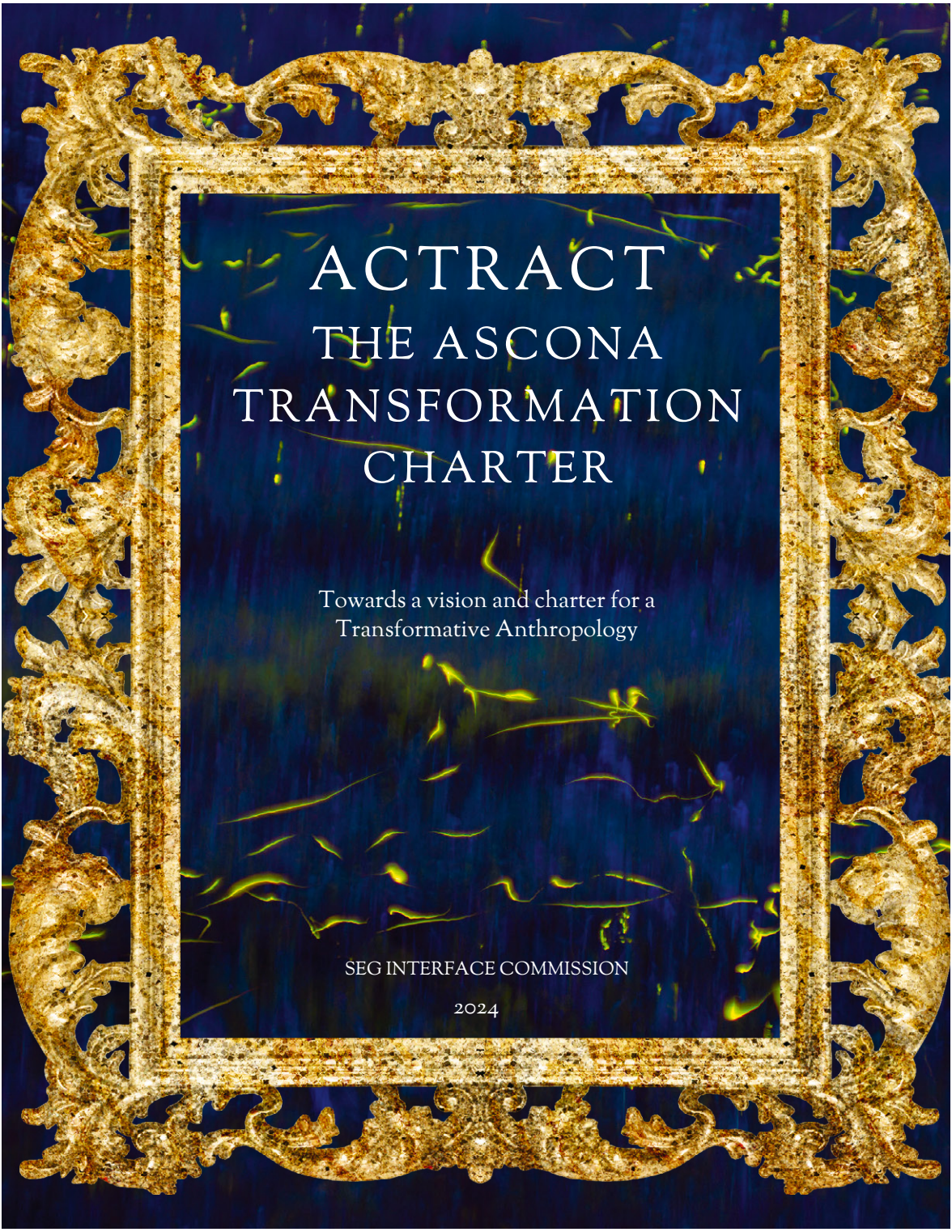
Eda Elif Tibet, Wyss Academy for Nature, University of Bern
Mike Poltorak, Interface Commission of the Swiss Anthropological Association



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CHARTER

CORE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES:

THE COLLECTIVE IDENTIFIES THE FOLLOWING POTENT VALUES FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY. WHILE WE RECOGNIZE THAT SUCH VALUES ARE FREQUENTLY ALLUDED TO, AND SOME HAVE EVEN BEEN HOLLOWED OUT BY THE NEOLIBERAL REFORM, WE CALL FOR A SYSTEMATIC EFFORT TO REAPPROPRIATE KEY VALUES SUCH AS CARE, RESPECT AND NON-EXTRACTIVISM, AND FOR A CONVERSATION ON INCLUSIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE WAYS TO REDEFINE THESE VALUES.

INTERNALLY ORIENTED VALUES:

WE GROUPED THE FIRST SET OF VALUES AS INTERNALLY ORIENTED, MEANING THAT THEY CONCERN HOW WE WORK AMONG OURSELVES IN OUR RESPECTIVE ANTHROPOLOGICAL CIRCLES, COMMUNITIES AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS. THE VISION IS TO RECUPERATE AND CONSOLIDATE THE PRINCIPLES OF CARE, RESPECT, COLLABORATION, FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND DIVERSITY AS BASIC PRINCIPLES IN OUR RESPECTIVE INSTITUTIONS AND POSITIONS.

CARE
RESPECT
COLLABORATION
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
DIVERSITY

WORK PROCESSUAL VALUES:

THESE VALUES CONCERN OUR WORK PROCESS AND THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH WE ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETY IN BROAD TERMS. THE AIM IS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORKING AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS FROM NEOLIBERAL DYNAMICS OF EXTRACTIVISM TO THAT OF INTEGRITY AND RECIPROCITY.

INTEGRITY
NON-EXTRACTIVISM
CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY
MULTIPLICITY
POLYPHONY

SOCIETAL COMMITMENTS:

THESE VALUES AND THEMES REFLECT OUR WIDER COMMITMENT TO ENGAGE WITH WIDER TOPICAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES. THE AIM IS TO SCALE UP THE TRANSFORMATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ANTHROPOLOGY BY ENGAGING WITH ALTERNATIVES AND ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES AND POWER ASYMMETRIES HEAD-ON. THIS NOTABLY CONCERNS COMMITMENTS TO:

ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES & POWER ASYMMETRIES
ALTERNATIVE VISIONS & PRACTICES
ENVIRONMENTAL & SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY
HOPE AS A DUTY

THE TIME FOR TRANSFORMATION

In this 21st century, the enormous scale and extent of social inequalities and ecological devastation prompt us to revisit the relevance and positionality of anthropology as a discipline and a societal project. How then to address systemic change and transformation both within and outside the discipline of anthropology?

We, as a collective of anthropologists from Switzerland and Europe, including members of the Swiss Anthropological Association (SAA), the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) and the Swiss Graduate School of Anthropology gathered in Ascona from June 3 to 5, 2024. Hosted by the SAA Interface Commission at the Centro Incontri Umani, we deliberated on the need and potential pathways for a transformative anthropology considering the triple planetary crisis, structural inequalities and deepening conflicts. Drawing on initial discussions hosted by the Interface Commission in 2022 around the theme of "imagining new anthropological futures", the Ascona meeting sought to take stock of contemporary conversations on the future of anthropology, and of practices aimed at transforming the discipline to tackle current challenges.

Specific challenges raised ranged from (post)colonial entanglements, rising authoritarianism and climate change to mental health challenges and rampant precarity in academia. In response, we consider that our discipline has much to offer. We are also sensitive to calls for anthropology to be transformed, just as the need to interrogate the nature of transformation in our increasingly interconnected societies, lifeways, and futures.

These concerns tie into wider dynamics of scientific freedom, changing university policies and the marginalization of anthropology as a discipline. Faced with the closing of departments, de facto censorship and the stigmatization of critical analysis as unscientific, transformative anthropology today is under huge pressure. We see this as a paradox of marginality despite clear relevance in addressing global challenges and development agendas - such as the SDGs, the green energy transition and 30 by 30. Under hegemonic neoliberal governance, many anthropologists are deeply affected, individually and collectively, by the increasing precarisation, exclusionary practices and prevalence of toxicity in academia.

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THE TIME FOR TRANSFORMATION

In response, we call for a shift from an individualistic mindset to collective responsibility, deliberation and action. To effectively navigate the challenges within and outside academia, it is vital to establish and adhere to shared values, principles and commitments, and to reappropriate them where they've been hollowed out. This will not only guide our work but also ensure that anthropology remains relevant, impactful, diverse and ethically grounded. In this context, we place great importance on and reiterate the fundamental role of our teaching, collective professional values and participatory research in better understanding and addressing the current crises. Instead of reproducing individualism in knowledge production, we call for commoning our research agendas and approaches that attend to care, respect, and justice in our engagements with local communities. This aligns with the need to develop shared visions of education and reconsider the institutional organization of knowledge.

Drawing from our experiences and engagements, we advocate for the deepening of collaborative approaches in research, teaching, communication and solution-building. While these engagements lead to good science and offer hope for practical alternatives to the current intersecting crises, we are concerned about the erasure and frequent denial of such knowledge, often stigmatized as non-scientific, biased, partisan, and irrelevant trouble-making. By building upon ongoing initiatives that tackle precarity, academic freedom and human rights, we emphasize the need to safeguard existing spaces and create new ones that promote reflection, vision, and the strengthening of collective efforts. The Ascona Charter spells out a set of generic values and concrete commitments to inspire hope, collective deliberation and catalyze transformative change.

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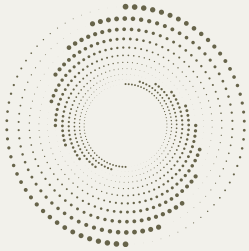

COMMITMENTS

PRIORITIZE THE WELL-BEING AND FUTURES OF OUR COLLEAGUES, STUDENTS, RESEARCH PARTNERS AND WIDER COMMUNITIES, FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE AND NURTURING WORK ENVIRONMENT

DEVELOP GUIDELINES FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND NURTURE ACADEMIC SPACES WITH ROOM FOR ENGAGED ACTION APPROACHES, DIFFERENCE OF OPINION AND POSITIONALITIES

STRENGTHEN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE CAREER PATHS, INCLUDING CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING FOR APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY AND OTHER FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT

COMBAT PRECARITY AMONG ANTHROPOLOGISTS IN ALL ITS FORMS AND ITS EFFECTS

OPERATIONALIZE THE DORA DECLARATION IN RELATION TO TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

PREPARE AND PROTECT COLLEAGUES AND COMMUNITIES BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER FIELDWORK IN CONTEXTS OF VIOLENCE AND OTHER RISKS

VALUE ENGAGEMENT WITH AND ACTIVELY PROMOTE INCLUSIVE DIVERSITY POLITICS THAT ACTIVELY COMBAT RACISM, SEXISM, LGBTQIA+ DISCRIMINATION, AND ABLEISM

NURTURE COLLECTIVE REFLECTION ON ETHICAL STANDARDS AND PRACTICES

INTERNALLY ORIENTED VALUES

CARE
RESPECT
COLLABORATION
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
DIVERSITY

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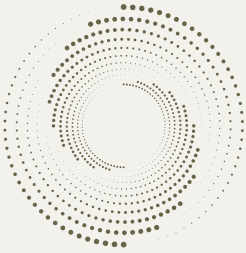


COMMITMENTS

ENSURE CONDITIONS FOR CONDUCTING SLOW SCIENCE INSTEAD OF NEOLIBERAL IMPERATIVES SUCH AS "PUBLISH OR PERISH"

PROMOTE THE COMMONING OF SCIENCE AND COLLABORATIVE WORK, WHILE SECURING COMMUNITIES IN RELATION TO DATA ACCESSIBILITY AND MANAGEMENT

CHALLENGE CURRENT RESEARCH ASSESSMENT METRICS AND PRACTICES AND WORK TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE MODELS

RETHINK TEACHING PRACTICES AND CURRICULA IN RELATION TO TRANSFORMATIVE VALUES AND COLLABORATIVE MODES OF ACTION

CONNECT CORE TRAINING IN ANTHROPOLOGY BASICS WITH CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

RECOGNIZE AND PROMOTE THE VALUE OF ALTERNATIVE (MULTIMODAL) MODES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

MAINTAIN AND REINFORCE OUR COMPETENCES, AND ESPECIALLY THOSE OF OUR STUDENTS, UNDER THREAT WITH THE ADVENT OF AI BASED ON LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS (LLM)

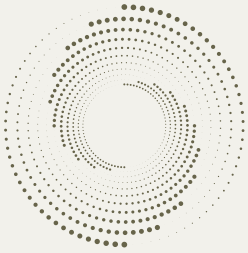
FOSTER SOLIDARITIES AND CONNECTIONS WITH LIKE-MINDED ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS, AND PROMOTE ALLYSHIP FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY WITHIN AND BEYOND ACADEMIA

REFLECT ON SETTING UP AN OMBUDSMAN FUNCTION AND MEDIATION MECHANISMS

PROCESSUAL VALUES

INTEGRITY
NON-EXTRACTIVISM
CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY
MULTIPLICITY AND PRACTICALITY
POLYPHONY

7



COMMITMENTS

ENGAGE WITH AND VALUE GRASSROOTS VISIONS, INNOVATIVE BOTTOM-UP INSTITUTION BUILDING AND CREATIVE PRACTICES. HIGHLIGHT HOW THE ALTERNATIVE VISIONS & PRACTICES THAT WE ARE STUDYING CAN INSPIRE CONCRETE POLITICAL ACTIONS AND PREVENT CO-OPTATION AND APPROPRIATION.

EXPAND THE TEACHING OF ANTHROPOLOGY IN WIDER FIELDS AND MUCH EARLIER IN THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS

BUILD NETWORKS AND POOL REGIONAL AND THEMATIC EXPERTISE AMONG ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ANTHROPOLOGISTS

CREATE AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND TOOLS FOR PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY (PODCASTS, BLOGS, MEDIA INTERVENTIONS, ENGAGEMENT WITH POLICY MAKERS)

VALUE CONCRETE OUTCOMES AND SOLUTION BUILDING INCLUDING IN THE MEDIA

PROMOTE DEBATE AND STRENGTHEN TRAINING AROUND INDIVIDUAL, COLLECTIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

PROMOTE ANTHROPOLOGY AS A TOOL TO DISRUPT INJUSTICE, OPPRESSION AND POWER INEQUALITIES, NURTURE HOPE, RECLAIM SPACES FOR REFLECTION, AND SHAPE BETTER FUTURES

SOCIETAL COMMITMENTS

ALTERNATIVE VISIONS & PRACTICES
ENVIRONMENTAL & SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
RESPONSIBILITY
HOPE AS A DUTY

8

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5 JUNE 2024 ASCONA

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OPINION PIECE FOR THE ASCONA TRANSFORMATION CHARTER

Danny Pinedo

The values and principles set out in the Ascona Transformation Charter are highly relevant to the Peruvian case. Many of the pressures and challenges faced by anthropologists in Switzerland and Europe are also present in anthropology practiced in Peru. An example of these common difficulties is the increasing precariousness of the academic work of anthropologists. In Peru, by law, the functions of a university professor include the permanent improvement of teaching, research, university management, and social outreach. However, the anthropologist must perform these functions in an environment of job insecurity, characterized by low wages, lack of job stability, and exhausting workdays, considering that he/she must teach at several universities at the same time to earn a decent salary.

Work overload affects the right to rest, compromising the physical and mental health of college professors, and negatively impacts their performance in teaching and research. Thus, the salaries received by university professors do not reflect the high workload and multiple responsibilities they must assume. This situation is even more serious in public universities, where successive governments have applied, for several decades, neoliberal public policies that have restricted budgets and investment in higher education. As a result, the important work carried out by professors is not recognized, which discourages their commitment to achieving academic excellence.

An additional element that accentuates the precariousness of academic work is the implementation of policies that promote an organizational culture that prioritizes quantitative indicators to measure productivity, which has as its main purpose obtaining accreditations for academic programs and departments and improving their positions in the rankings. Under these criteria, the success of professors is measured through the number of publications, especially articles published in journals indexed in databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, and not through the performance of the professor in the comprehensive training of students. These quantitative productivity parameters are also used to determine the granting of bonuses to encourage research among university professors, which are so necessary in a country like Peru with so little support in this regard. This situation creates a climate of constant pressure to publish, which in recent years has encouraged the emergence of dishonest practices such as the purchase of authorship in scientific publications.

This way of evaluating the performance of academic work implies a bias towards a reality more in line with the Global North academy, where professors have greater economic opportunities to conduct research and publish. This evaluation model is also discriminatory towards the social sciences and humanities since it establishes minimum scores that can only be achieved by publishing a large number of articles in databases specialized in hard sciences.

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In Peru, as in other Latin American countries, anthropologists and other scholars in the humanities and social sciences do not necessarily publish in journals indexed in Scopus or Web of Science, but in indexes such as Latindex, which are not taken into account as evaluation criteria or receive lower scores than the other indexes. In this way, it is very difficult for anthropologists to meet the requirements that allow them to access financial support for research.

Therefore, as a professor of anthropology at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, I subscribe to the values and principles assumed by the Ascona Transformation Charter, especially with regard to combating precariousness among anthropologists in all its forms and effects, ensuring conditions for the practice of slow science instead of neoliberal imperatives such as "publish or perish," and challenging the current parameters of research evaluation by proposing alternative models. I believe that to the extent that we can make effective and real changes in this direction, we will have taken important steps towards a more committed, democratic, and transformative anthropology, especially in a country in permanent crisis like Peru.

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THE ASCONA CHARTER

A Desire for Transformation or a Moral Argument?

Laurent S. Fournier

How can we not adhere to the values proposed by the Ascona Charter? Has transforming anthropology in order to transform the world never been more urgent? The suggestions of the working group meeting in Ascona in June 2024 arouse admiration for a whole series of reasons. In fact, they reconnect with the posture of the committed intellectual, going against a massive neoliberal trend that has for decades valued individual productivity and the race for excellence. They draw a lucid observation about the multiplicity of crisis factors, which unfold from the individual to the global scale. Close to people, feelings of anxiety caused by ambient authoritarianism make it increasingly difficult to carry out personal projects. At a collective level, social inequalities and precariousness seem to increase endlessly. At the global level, the ecological crisis makes long-term projections increasingly difficult. In this seemingly desperate context, the need for collective and collaborative action seems to be both a practical and ethical necessity.

The merit of the Ascona Charter is therefore to identify problems and propose effective solutions to transform a situation that has become so dramatic for humanity. The dynamics of the proposed transformation are based on "internally oriented values" which should be respected in the work of anthropology itself, on "work processual values" which concern our relationships with the societies that we study, and on "societal commitments" regarding our ability to respond to global challenges.

The ethical discourse proposed must, however, not mask the problems linked to the concrete possibilities of its implementation. It should be remembered here that certain anthropological associations have drawn attention to the limits inherent in ethical charters, which can be especially counterproductive when they are transformed into instruments for standardizing "best practices" (Benveniste and Sélim 2014, 21–22). The risk of any ethical discourse is in fact to propose a unified point of view which goes against "indigenous" or "grounded" epistemologies and ends up giving good conscience to the dominant discourse, according to a largely ethnocentric perspective. There is then a risk of reducing the diversity of ways of practicing anthropology, in the name of moral arguments. To put it simply, is the constitutive diversity of anthropologists' field experiences compatible with the formulation of a unified ethical posture of the profession? Here, we should therefore be wary of easy tendencies towards "ethical exorcism" and the "duty of moralization", tendencies which are otherwise so widespread in all social, economic, and political fields.

Another discussion that cannot fail to emerge when reading the Ascona Charter concerns the expression of "commitments" in the form of a long series of action verbs. The list of these verbs (prioritize, develop, strengthen, combat, operationalize, prepare, value, nurture, promote, challenge, reinforce, connect, expand, build, create...) is a constructivist desire and

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the "to do list" does not leave much room for more discreet dimensions such as symbolic imagination or sensorial experiences.

As a conclusion, if it seems important today to express a global desire for transformation, anthropologists should be able to respect the very forms of desire, which are by nature changing, localized, and inherently diverse.

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ANTHROPOESY

Raminder Kaur

Abstract

What might the transformation in transformative anthropology entail? While several responses might be generated, one element that is generally kept to the background is transformation from within. This "inner enquiry" is not necessarily of the self-reflexivity school, nor of decolonizing initiatives alone, but one that asks for a *deep decoloniality* of the propertied self along with a *deep ethnography* with those designated as Other, objects or subjects of the anthropological endeavour. If we do not transform from within, we will continue to retain propertied notions of the self's relationship to the world, *Weltbeziehungen*, with their objectified identities, differences and hierarchies both between human, and in relation to non-human lifeforms—which is how the chain-reaction of violences began culminating in the multiple planetary and societal crises of today. In critical response, I propose an anthropoesy—a co-creative conjunction *with* lifekind.

Keywords: engaged anthropology, multi-species anthropology, decoloniality, co-creative action research

You lack a foot to travel?
Then journey into yourself
That leads to transformation of dust into pure gold.
(Jalal al-Din Rumi)

Without meaningful transformation from within, there is no transformation. Similarly, a transformative anthropology needs to begin from within. Ever since its emergence around the turn of the twentieth century, and despite its critiques or ambivalences, anthropology remained reined in with external enterprises to do with colonialism, capitalism, expansionism, exploitation, extractivism, institutionalization along with classifications, collections and documentations of the Other. After a spate of challenges from these Others—the formerly colonized, women and other oppressed groups—the tables began to turn bringing with it a certain freedom, on the one hand, and a self-reflexive lens, on the other (Clifford and Marcus 1986). But this freedom was a chequered one as post- or neocolonial avatars cemented themselves, and backlashes began. And the self-reflexive lens continued to skirt around hardened institutional legacies that had accreted in the discipline. A more politicized, action-based and public-facing orientation was needed as Setha M. Low and Sally Engle Merry (2010) summarise with their six-point agenda for engaged anthropology—sharing and sup-

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port, teaching and public education, social critique, collaboration, advocacy and activism. However, their suggestions stop short of engaging inner worlds, fully acknowledging that the distinction between inner and outer can be a dualistic artifice.

What many scholars remain anxious about is a *deep decoloniality*—a purging from within that can also begin to remove thickened encrustations all around, while tending to, and making amends for violence against the excluded and the exploited (see Kaur and Klinkert 2021). If we do not transform from within, we will continue to retain objectified and propertied notions of the self's relationship to the world, *Weltbeziehungen* (Hollstein et al. 2023), which is how the chain-reaction of violences all began culminating in the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss along with structural inequalities and increasing conflicts as outlined in The Ascona Transformation Charter (ACTRACT, in this volume). To counter these multiple violences with the mobilization of Global South nativist narratives may also come with a mirror-dance of problematic politics to do with objectified identities, differences and hierarchies both between human, and in relation to non-human lifeforms.

Stepping aside from humanism for a moment may offer one path as multi-species anthropology reveals (e. g., Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; Locke and Munster 2015; Fijn and Kavesh 2021). The painting on the right is called "All we ask is to breathe" by Sohana Bains. It is a reminder that virtually all sea turtles are endangered, killed for their meat, skins, shells and eggs. Others drown as they swim, for they become accidental bycatch in trawler nets and cannot come up to breathe. Their eggs are also affected by rising sand temperature that affects their sex ratio. Not only do they suffer from the scourge of human greed, but also as victims to mass-trawling in polluted seas, and casualties of climate change, invariably anthropogenic. Can we begin to see and feel through the body of the sea turtle?

At heart to self and consequently social and planetary transformation is a requisite ego-loss, that might enable viewing the world through other eyes (or senses if they are eye-less). Arvindpal Singh Mandair elaborates, through an exegesis of the opening words in the *Adi Granth* composed by Guru Nanak (1469–1539), on "a self-enforced withdrawal of ego at the very moment that the self names itself as 'I' and thus starts to become an origin or absolute centre in relation to all other existing things including others" (2014, 304). It is only by self-dissolution leading to self-less self-discoveries can we begin to nurture deeper awareness, wisdom and approaches to reconnect with "all other existing things" whether it be the earth, its multifarious lifeforms, and whatever may lie within, on and beyond.

Transformative anthropology is not just about rewinding the path of anthropological ancestors, however critical. It requires undermining their objectivist and rationalist stances premises altogether, ruminating about other pathways, visible or not, in terms of going beyond the immediacy of the material, spatial, temporal, conceptual and/or ontological. It is about taking reflective action, while courageously unfolding synergies with a revitalized relationship to the vulnerabilities of multiple lives and the politico-economic systems that they are ingrained in, all brought together on a weathered planet with "care, respect, collaboration, freedom of expression and diversity as basic principles in our respective institutions and positions" (ACTRACT).

Figure 1: Sohana Bains, “All we ask is to breathe”, 2024.

Rumination needs to be unmoored from psychological associations (see Nolen-Hoeksema et al. 2008) to return to its etymological bearings of "thinking deeply". This may entail a *deep ethnography* that ventures inwards so as it may turn outwards with shifted subjectivities: from Self-Other to selves in others, and others in selves; from classification to collaboration; and from analysis to appreciation where I-dea and I-dentity are put under erasure. This deep ethnography is not a proposal for more psychoanalytical extractivism, self-reflexivity or positionality; rather more imaginative works of joint (self-)discoveries and mutual change and exchange.[1] Anthropology as the study *of* humankind—etymologically, ontologically and epistemologically—needs to be transformed to an *anthropoesy*, a co-creative conjunction *with* lifekind. Getting down to practice, it might involve co-creative action research: creating a song, performance, film, artwork or exhibition together;[2] dialogic/multilogic co-presentations and protestations, in-person or online; or collaboratively collaging and writing an article, book or coproducing other forms of expression (e. g., Kaur and Eqbal 2018; Bejarano et al. 2019). It may even mean stepping down from authorial roles altogether, so as participants step up as proposed for "fifth cinema" (Kaur and Grassilli 2019). Such praxis can become the basis "for a shift from an individualistic mindset to collective responsibility, deliberation and action" (ACTRACT).

Anthropoesy is not a prescriptive programme, but a proposal for a processual unfolding with which to navigate the minefield of the mindfield—one that requires a cre-active responsiveness, responsibility and unwavering commitment, while being fully attuned to self, others and the environment. It is a quest for co-breath where our breathing needs to be attuned to other lifeforms. Through the unfolding self comes the transformation, within and without, and this is where the gems of regeneration may lie.

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[1] This deep ethnography does not therefore correlate with the ethno-psychoanalytical approach adopted by Eva van Roekel (2023) to explore feelings about violence in Argentina.

[2] One example is co-creative work as part of the Consortium on Practices of Wellbeing and Resilience (Co-POWeR) https://www.sussex.ac.uk/research/projects/co-power/.

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ASCONA CHARTER RESPONSE—TOWARDS A JUST ACADEMIA

Proposing a Personalization Approach

Estella Carpi

Abstract

This contribution proposes a primary focus on academia as a relational economy that subtends academics as individuals, rather than on relationships running between academics and the outside world—such as research participants. In this regard, while we academics hide behind fatalistic determination that underlies the abstract idea of a "neoliberal academia"—as though "neoliberal academia" could ever be a given formula, a given reality—the "neoliberal academia" that also the Ascona Charter refers to is empirically about people's attitudes, personal decisions and deeds. In order to liberate anthropologists from the discursive abstractivism of transformation, the contribution invites us to acknowledge the relational economy we are all part of and our own deontology of research and teaching as individual-centred and entirely individual-dependent.

Keywords: *personalization, relational economy, behavioural dissonance, radical pedagogy, discursive abstractivism*

I am based in a multidisciplinary department, which includes anthropologists as well as earth scientists and engineers etc. This provides me with the perspective of understanding the academic potential to transform life and the human approach mainly through physical interventions. This encounter between different fantasies around transformative disciplines such as anthropology is a continuously regenerative experience for me, as I end up approaching the meaning and developing my personal imagination around the potential to transform in daily conversation with such different voices.

In this short commentary, I would like to focus on how I primarily envision intellectual and practical transformation within the academic and the material world. With this endeavour, I will focus on the internally oriented values of the Charter (e. g., care, respect and collaboration), proposing a larger focus on academia as a relational economy that subtends academics as individuals, rather than on relationships running between academics and the outside world—such as research participants—which has already been tackled widely in contemporary debates. In the effort to address major issues such as today's social inequalities and ecological devastation, the Ascona Charter explicitly encourages us to "revisit the relevance and positionality of anthropology as a discipline and a societal project". In line with this collective effort, I foreground the importance of personalization as a catalyser for transformation. In this regard, over the last few years, I have reflected on how the role of "re-per-

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sonalizing" academic work as well as of co-feeling and putting in practice the values we write on within the political and moral economy of academia (Carpi 2020; Carpi 2021; Carpi 2023).

While we academics hide behind fatalistic determination that underlies the abstract idea of a "neoliberal academia"—as though "neoliberal academia" could ever be a given formula, a given reality—the "neoliberal academia" that also the Ascona Charter refers to is empirically about people's attitudes, personal decisions and deeds. In such a fatalistic determination, the possibility for change is never truly contemplated, but, importantly, it is continuously championed in academic environments through decolonial, feminist and radical writing, as evidenced by the extremely large number of publications focused on such themes in the present times. The act of parading a radical approach to research and to academic politics while acting inconsistently (e.g., speaking about empowering research subjects while doing power games with subordinates, or advocating against plagiarism while plagiarizing others) is a key component of academics' behavioural dissonance, and it is successful in working against what Brazilian pedagogist Paulo Freire calls a "radical pedagogy" in his *Pedagogy of Indignation* (2004). Indeed, when too many people benefit from the status quo, radical changes become challenging, or even impossible.

Personalizing bad and positive human practices—something that UK academia particularly struggles with, due to a traditionally impersonal politics of communication (Carpi 2023)—means identifying the people who adopt conservative and unjust behaviours and undertake power abuse, rather than blaming an abstract system of power and control—which published academic work already extensively challenges. It means opening up some space for a radical pedagogy that is able to undermine such abstractness of injustice and enslavement. Freire's radical pedagogy is, to me, the only possible, real pedagogy able to drive us towards a transformative anthropology.

Building upon Freire, finding "existential consistency" means reflecting indignation into the intimate dimension of living, in the way we denounce the politics around us, and in the relational economy that we actively build on a daily basis. In this vein, we pave the way to a transformative anthropology by teaching and researching *with* indignation towards diversely defined inequalities, injustice and extractivism, rather than merely teaching and research such forms of indignation (Carpi 2023), which is what we anthropologists have already engaged with over the last decades.

While, through the act of teaching indignation, students are taught that the future is a possibility they can work on, we as anthropological researchers and teachers often give up the dichotomy between the politically active and the pedagogical. However, as Freire warned us all, there is no system which has forced us to experience it as a dichotomy, but it is rather us, researchers and educators, who have abdicated change through behavioural dissonance.

With the purpose of re-personalizing what is paraded as a self-critical academic discourse (e. g., Clark-Kazak 2019), we need to begin with re-individualizing the enunciative effort per se of being transformative. Also, in order for these efforts to be effective, we should reframe ethical responsibility in academic research as individual-focused and interrogating ourselves about the sort of anthropologists we currently are (also see Dunn 2018). In fact, the researcher's sensitivity and respectfulness—which also underpin the Ascona Charter—towards

research participants as well as our colleagues are not commonly associated with the accepted definitions of research excellence or scientific rigour.

In ultimate analysis, for anthropology to be truly transformative and based on principles such as care, critical reflexivity, respect and non-extractivism (as advocated for in the Charter), we need to speak about anthropologists rather than anthropology. The problematic de-personalization I have focused on, indeed, thrives on the terminological politics underlying it. In this vein, to liberate anthropologists from the discursive abstractivism of transformation, we need to acknowledge the relational economy we are all part of and our own deontology of research and teaching as individual-centred and entirely individual-dependent. No matter how painful that can be.

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REAFFIRMING THE ROLE OF ANTHROPOLOGY IN TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Responses, Resonance, and Seizing Opportunities

Peter Bille Larsen, Eda Elif Tibet, and Mike Poltorak

Abstract

This brief response to reviews of the Ascona Charter asks how it resonates with and connects diverse realities, concerns, and experiences of transformation. The Charter responds to a collective call from students and engaged scholars for adopting collective action that prioritizes transformation and positive change in the world, rather than remaining caught in neoliberal metrics and individualized trajectories. By operationalizing the Charter's values, anthropology can reclaim its relevance and contribute meaningfully to addressing the triple planetary crisis. Through embracing multimodal approaches, fostering ethical partnerships, and advocating for systemic change, anthropologists can play a pivotal role in addressing the pressing challenges of our time.

Keywords: *engaged anthropology*, *transformation*, *ethics*, *planetary crisis*, *reflexivity*

Working collectively on the Ascona Charter was a critical opportunity to bridge a growing call within anthropology to address global challenges through transformative practice with the grounded experience of members of the SEG Interface Commission for Engaged Anthropologists and EASA networks[1]. The Charter, foremost, responds to a collective call from students and engaged scholars for adopting collective action that prioritizes transformation and positive change in the world, rather than remaining caught in neoliberal metrics and individualized trajectories.

How then does a document like the Ascona Charter resonate with and connect diverse realities, concerns, and experiences of transformation? Can it inspire new questions,

[1] The SEG Interface Commission for Engaged Anthropologists is dedicated to transformative spaces, knowledge, and action for advancing a different kind of engaged academia and informed practice.This includes collective publications that advocate for new discourses around non-binary engagement practices (that does aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice), as well as summer schools where mentors and core faculty are selected from practitioner anthropologists. Most interface members are actively engaged as committed anthropologists and function within, outside, and beyond academia. This approach has fostered an expansive network that now attracts individuals and anthropology enthusiasts from diverse sectors, disciplines, and countries.

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thoughts, and practices? Can collective action be considered despite ever-individualized forms of knowledge production and career paths? We are now in the process of stimulating further conversations to move the Charter forward in addressing specific challenges and seizing opportunities for collective action. The Charter has been presented at meetings in Switzerland as well as the EASA general Assembly in Barcelona. More is needed.

There are clear parallels with other calls for addressing precarity, coloniality, and global inequalities, yet bridging separate threads, pathways, and silos remains challenging. If the Charter aims to connect discussions on the pluriversal planetary crisis with a re-evaluation of our academic spaces, then we must consider its role and impact beyond our "own" conversations and spheres. Anthropology, we insist, far too often remains pigeonholed as localized knowledge without fully mobilizing its global scope and transformative potential. There are no easy answers, but the commentaries to the Charter in different ways highlight the importance of deepening the dialogue and drawing further attention to the interconnections involved.

Danny Pinedo, Professor at the San Marcos University, Peru draws attention to the relevance of the Charter for the complexities experienced in Peru, where an "anthropologist must perform ... in an environment of job insecurity, characterized by low wages, lack of job stability and exhausting workdays". Subscribing to the values and principles of the Charter, he offers a lucid account of precarity and discrimination in the academic sphere in situations of structural insecurity and crisis. If the Charter values resonate, they also prompt the need for a far more decentered perspective of academic experience and what constitutes relevant forms of action.

Laurent Fournier, President of the French Association of Anthropology notes how the Charter reconnects with "the posture of the committed intellectual" identifying both problems and proposing effective solutions. Yet, he challenges us all to think about standardized best practices and the risk of reducing diversity of anthropological approaches. Interrogating the list of commitments, he asks what room it leaves for symbolic imagination and sensorial experience. In what could be read as a relativist posture, he concludes how desires are "changing, localized and inherently diverse".

Raminder Kaur, Professor at Sussex University, highlights that one of the Charter's most forward-thinking aspects is its recognition of diverse methodologies, particularly those that extend beyond textual narratives. Incorporating film, art, and digital media—the Charter offers powerful tools for engaging broader publics and fostering empathy and understanding. Calling for a transformation "from within" to "ruminate about other pathways, visible or not, in terms of going beyond the immediacy of the material, spatial, temporal, conceptual, and/or ontological".

Estella Carpi, Associate Professor at the University of London, draws parallels to her work on "re-personalizing" academic work and "putting in practice the values we write". Connecting the Charter's call for care, respect, and collaboration she sees "personalization as a catalyzer for transformation" in a Paolo Freirian call for "existential consistency". Carpi encourages us to "teach[ing] and research[ing] *with* indignation towards diversely defined inequalities, injustice, and extractivism".

The ease at which commentators connect transformative pathways to deep reflexivity and theoretical complexity is noteworthy. Epistemological critique and reflexivity are the

very basis for numerous calls for engaged anthropology (Low and Merry 2010; Kirsch 2018; Larsen et al 2022), yet how can it all connect in the broader quest for transformative change?

Seizing Opportunities

"Nice values, but what do they mean in practice?", the question from a colleague struggling with precarity was clear and refreshingly down to earth. Another colleague wondered how the Charter differed from positive value statements found across HR departments and university agendas. While the Ascona Charter sets a visionary path, its implementation presents collective challenges, but also a clear opportunity to distinguish its actions from neoliberal solutionism. Take the Better Science initiative underlining how "Research culture should be defined by fairness, appreciation, diversity and holistic assessment". While on paper an institutional ally for transformative change, the nature of several of the 10 actions do come across as highly individualized. Encouraging precarious academics to "take your time to think" considering that "time-outs and breaks stimulate your creativity", to quote one action commitment, seems to be a neoliberal distraction without much relevance or support for collective action.[2] Engaged anthropology requires long-term collective commitments, substantial funding, and institutional support that move beyond individual nudging.

On the 22nd November, 2024 the Ascona Charter was presented at a roundtable during the SAA Annual Meeting in Luzern revealing particularly Swiss concerns, with global resonance.

Nina Khamsy, from the Graduate Institute, addressed the structural challenges facing anthropologists, noting that in 2017 in Switzerland, "only 13% of academic staff have permanent positions, while 85% are in temporary roles". She suggested that the charter could build upon existing initiatives aimed at addressing precarity in academia, such as discussions at the SAA conference (2018), EASA (2019), and the DocPostDoc commission workshop (2023). Emphasizing the reality that the majority of anthropologists will pursue careers beyond academia, she argued that this shift does not lessen anthropology's significance but rather highlights its broader societal impact. To support this transition, Khamsy advocated for a blend of policy-driven efforts and practical approaches, proposing that the Charter be used to encourage multi-modal teaching and better equip students for diverse professional pathways.

Tobias Haller from the University of Bern stressed the need for anthropology to retain its critical stance, particularly when engaging with dominant global frameworks such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Describing the SDGs as a "new ecological Bible," he criticized their tendency to marginalize local perspectives. He underscored anthropology's role in amplifying these voices and ensuring that local communities are actively included in discussions on development and sustainability.

Filipe Calvao from the Graduate Institute questioned whether anthropology, as a discipline, is truly prepared for collective responsibility, noting that increasing individualiza-

[2] https://betterscience.ch/en/calls-to-action/#/, accessed November 30, 2024.

tion—partly driven by precarious working conditions—has shaped academic practice. While he recognized the value of collaboration in theory, he was uncertain about its practical viability, expressing doubts about how effectively collective engagement could be implemented. Despite these concerns, he saw potential in the Charter as a means to address vulnerabilities within the field and foster greater structural support.

The meeting emphasized the continuous need for reflexivity in balancing and combining action and academic rigor. The Ascona Charter's vision aligns with a broader movement in anthropology that is not just about understanding the world but committed to changing it for the better. There is much weariness with catchy commitments and concepts in the current climate of neoliberal agendas and an individualized "rat race". So how can the Charter be any different from the on-going push to claim "better science" in a framework governed by flawed notions of individualized knowledge production and excellence? The Ascona Charter was an attempt to recuperate language so easily hollowed out or rendered irrelevant by generalities. Yet, what hinders it from being conflated with the latter? The Ascona Charter represents a bold vision for anthropology, yet its success depends on bridging the gap between its ideals and the practical realities of precarity and embracing collective responsibility to maintain the discipline's critical voice in confronting global crises. By operationalizing the Charter's values, anthropology can reclaim its relevance and contribute meaningfully to addressing the triple planetary crisis. Through embracing multimodal approaches, fostering ethical partnerships, and advocating for systemic change, anthropologists can play a pivotal role in addressing the pressing challenges of our time. We identify one need and two areas of action to put the Ascona Charter into practice:

1. We need Institutional Support: Universities and funding bodies must prioritize and incentivize engaged, collaborative approaches and readiness to address structural inequalities.
2. We can offer Training and Mentorship: Programs like those of the Interface commission could be models for training future anthropologists in multimodal, critical approaches and engaged methods.
3. We could create Networking Platforms: Strengthening platforms for exchange among engaged anthropologists can foster best practices and collaborative opportunities.

This Charter is not just a call to action—it is an open platform for a more engaged, ethical, and impactful anthropology.

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BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS / REZENSIONEN

THE AFTERLIVES OF EXTRACTION
Alternatives and Sustainable Futures

Filipe Calvão, Matthew Archer, Asanda Benya, eds. 2024. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV.

In the conundrum of contemporary political approaches to anthropogenic climate change, some avenues of answers are taking shape, presenting themselves as the legitimate ones to cope with and answer this problem. Yet these remain mainly technocratic and restrain the democratic spaces for the unfolding of new types of politics. The resources extractions and the ambiguous imbrication of extractivism to the energy transition as part of the answers – the paradox of green extractivism – provide a puzzling situation to unpack. In the realm of debates and discussions, these are political spaces necessary to deconstruct the future's fixing (Goodale 2023) that energy transition's mining intensifies (Kronenburg García and Wiegink 2024) fueling technical solutions. To explore this, one has to understand the power and predominance of extractivism as a logic that informs practices, imaginaries, and representations.

The Afterlives of Extraction: Alternatives and Sustainable Futures, edited by Filipe Calvão, Matthew Archer, and Asanda Benya, provides a captivating analysis of these problems. It places its contribution at the center of debates around the intertwined relationship between resource extraction and capitalism development, nested within the intricate discussions of economic growth and socio-environmental sustainability relationship. For development models and common sense in many locations, this connection is crucial, as the volume explores.

In the introduction, the editors show two main narratives. First, the developmentalist approach argues for the legitimacy of extraction, framed as suited and inevitable practice to achieve socio-economic development and thus reducing poverty. The volume shows that the mining industry places itself as promoter of this logic, by incorporating the narrative in new ways of carrying out the mining practice. Devotees of this viewpoint contend that resource extraction can be done responsibly, both socially and environmentally. Especially in this recent context of anthropogenic climate change, where new debates add to the already-present ones on how to behave in the green transition. Consequently, this intensifies mining legitimacy instead of diminishing, framed as decisive to achieve the goals of decarbonization while maintaining economic growth. This is the case of the mining of critical minerals used exponentially for technological devices of "clean" energy storage, a social process that the chapters of James Blair et al, Michelle Pressend, and Devyn Remme illustrate for the cases of Chile, South Africa, and Norway.

On the other hand, the critic of extractivism has no doubt: what produces and exacerbates environmental degradation, social inequality, and human rights violations is the extraction of resources. The volume's introduction shows that the reason why this happens is straightforward, since extractivism upholds a system of accumulation prioritizing profit over the welfare of people and the planet. As such, critics of extractivism state that any efforts to

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enhance the sustainability of mining operations are useless and represent superficial greenwashing that doesn't prevent harms, inevitable to resource extraction.

These debates are further analyzed and illustrated by the collection of contributions of this volume, distributed into three sections: Debates and Practices of Post-extractivism; Resilience, Contestation and Resistance; Green Extractivism and its Discontent. This book is a second part of a duo of publications by the same editors. *The lives of Extraction: Identities, Communities, and the Politics of Place* explored the operations of extractive industries in their expansions, their lived experiences by communities, indigenous peoples and workers. The second volume takes a step further from the basis established by the first volume, in dissecting extractivism, analyzing resistance to it, and exploring alternatives.

The volume argues that the key issue driving these discussions today is the growing acknowledgment of the unsustainability of an economic development model reliant on fossil fuels and resource extraction. Yet how to explain that extractivism keeps having a central role intertwining with the green transition as an answer to anthropogenic climate change? The goal of this academic contribution becomes that of dissecting extractivism from its fixed definitions and genealogy to see in practice how this takes shape.

Erik Post's and Alexander Dunlap's contributions tackle the first point. They show the importance of extractivism as an analytic, providing a qualitative overview of theories central to the concept. The first author shows that extractivism becomes pivotal to capitalism but without being coterminous. Instead, extractivisms, in the plural form, are modes of extraction that sustain the imperial mode of living, one that smooths the path for extraction of minerals and energy sources. Similarly, Dunlap lays open the dominant techno-industrial development, providing insights on how it becomes a framework of imaginaries and practices. For the editors, this chapter shows the "chameleonic ability of green growth to camouflage itself within apparently different discourses" (p. 15). Dunlap highlights the connection between extractivism and infrastructure within a development model that frames this combination as the solution to climate change, revealing how it shapes, and it's shaped by political perspectives and ideologies.

Dorothea Hamilton and Sina Trölenberg further the conceptual analysis of extractivism by questioning its applicability to cases in the Global North, against the grain of the current academic literature, that focuses too much on the Global South and on mining given its genealogy in Latin American critical thought. Instead, they argue that extractivism can be applied to large scale landscape destruction, for activities happening in the Global North too. Focusing on anti-extractivist practices in Germany surrounding the deforestation for extensive infrastructure projects like the highway passing through Dannenrod, they illustrate the clash between imaginaries. This insight is central to the approach this volume follows, in questioning the space of conceptualization and debates. The chapter shows the encounter of imaginaries of nature and ideas of good life at odds, and they raise the question of the researcher's own engagement with these positionings. By focusing on this German controversy, they illustrate how a national debate sparkles and how extractivism becomes central for this political confrontation.

Yet spaces of dialogue are scarcely present in contemporary unfolding of the energy transition. Blair and colleagues' chapter analyzes the important case of lithium extraction, cen-

tral for the supposedly clean energy storage preached by several actors like the automobile industry or some environmental movements especially in the Global North. Nonetheless, these scholars show the paradox of green extractivism, when the extractive industry operates as necessary practice for the sustainable future of no carbon-emissions yet generating alterlives of ecological exhaustion. Policy oriented, their chapter explores possibilities for local and indigenous participation, questioning the Chilean constitutional reform that didn't take place after national vote.

The volume strength is to focus on the space of ideas and political imaginaries that inform practice that social sciences and civil society are observing. Instead of a collection of case studies that would remain at the level of the factual happenings, scholars reunited here open the discussion for exploring the persistence of extractivism beyond its practice, to tackle how this intertwines with political projects of development. The editors argue for the necessary advancement of alternatives: decoloniality, degrowth, and resistance.

The book is a very qualitative contribution, and aimed at an audience of scholars, policymakers, and development professionals, as the volume is part of the series International Development Policy by the Geneva Graduate Institute. This also means that reading becomes difficult if one doesn't have a background in current debates on extractivism. The risk is that the democratic space for citizens to actively have a say in the unfolding of the energy transition closes in what I argue to be a field of expertise. Unwillingly, academia too becomes an expert language that risk not resonating with the aspirations, feelings, and lived experience of a majority of citizens, like the recent Argentine case shows. The election of the anarco-capitalist Javier Milei has intensified the willingness of a majority of citizens to go against sustainable development, discourses of energy and green transition, and critical works of social scientists, as these don't make sense for their sense of good life. How to escape the field of expertise becomes a crucial question for scholars analyzing extractivism and energy in its political forms in their dialogue with the audience of citizens.

Crucially call for decoloniality and indigenous integration in discussions as active actors, the volume questions major political narratives and developmentalist approaches, even going to interrogate the persistence of development and exploring different paths based on other ideological foundations. The difference contributors make between extraction and extractivism gives us leads to understanding how extractivism is a powerful source of fuel that ignites contemporary politics. Together with the first volume, these works make a major contribution to the field.

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FRONTIERS OF BELONGING
The Education of Unaccompanied Refugee Youth

Lems, Annika. 2022. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Based on seventeen months close-up, immersive ethnographic research with unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in Switzerland, conducted between 2015 and 2017 in the cantons of Bern and Zurich, this book looks at what makes up the ordinary of young people struggling to find a way to cope with the conditions of existence imposed by Swiss institutions. More specifically, Lems has taken an active part in the educational options available to them, having notably participated in a pilot integration class project and a radio show, which was part of a state-run educational program. These were special school classes created specifically for unaccompanied minors, with the aim of adapting the curriculum and content to their levels. Annika Lems took part on a daily basis as a teaching assistant. She was particularly involved in the radio program, which gave a voice to young people. By rubbing shoulders in class, in the yards, in the streets, and in the homes, they have come to know and trust each other. She has forged quality, and sometimes intimate, relationships with some of the boys and girls whose stories, fragmentary and so different from each other, are told to us in the six chapters. They come from Guinea, Eritrea, or Somalia, and they're called Thierno, Jamila, Meron, Samuel, Yusuf, Omar, or Abel. A great achievement of this book is that Annika Lems manages to make their voices heard, not only in the form of indirect speech, but also in the form of direct quotes. She acts as a powerful relay of their deep concerns. Listen to Abel's words written on a Post-it: "I am not alive. Maybe dead. I am in heaven. Do I still live on this earth?" (3). Or Jamila: "I just want to be normal, but here I am not." (51) Or Samuel: "I am interested in how the world came to the level it is now." (87) Or Thierno: "they didn't listen to me." (141)

In the general field of migration studies, it is rare to find such a sensitive and tactful book. The pervasiveness of dominant tropes and standardized language often prevents talented researchers from providing detailed, complex, and alternative pictures of what life is like for children and adolescents, not only when they're on the move, but also once they've "arrived," so to say. Annika Lems avoids the trap of conformity. What's more, she beautifully renders the complex existential textures of the lives she has encountered by making us hear and see the young people's own perspectives on their experiences. This is no mean feat, as it is precisely what is lacking in this field. Her meticulous attention to particulars, minor modes of communication, murmurs, and silences, is of immense value: it reveals the way in which exclusionary politics disguised as integration seeps into every nook and cranny of everyday life.

At the heart of her book lies the paradox of asylum policies in Switzerland: young people are ostracized by the very policies designed to integrate them. While, on the one hand, public institutions (especially school) use and promote a humanitarian language of inclusion, deservingness, and hope, in practice these policies have the effect of excluding, segregating, and hindering the young asylum seekers. Annika Lems masterfully demonstrates the detailed mechanisms and moralities that, at every level, produce what she calls "inclusive exclusion." Excluded from what? From going to school with other Swiss and non-Swiss children, from

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sharing the same playground, from studying, from entering the wider job market, from social mobility, from sharing a civic life with others; all this while, at the same time, they are told that they're being integrated precisely by these means. This contradiction, which borders on a form of madness, is further reinforced by more general contradictory injunctions: while to obtain asylum they are expected to overplay their vulnerability as victims (usually by having to prove that they have been tortured and by theatricalizing their suffering), for successful integration they are asked to be exceptionally resilient, strong, and robust. So, in everyday life, these teenagers are expected to learn German in a couple of years (whereas some don't even know the alphabet), catch up on their schooling, and find a job, all the while having to behave well, stay quiet, adopt the local culture, and overcome their traumas. Yet, still having to demonstrate their victim status, they must dramatize their fragility, prove the persecution they have suffered, and display the symptoms of their trauma. Hence, "within these settings it becomes close to impossible for the young people to make the move into mainstream education. If they display too much autonomy, they run the risk of losing their status as vulnerable/deserving child refugees, but if they display too little autonomy, they are deemed not fit for public schooling because of their vulnerability." (25) Annika Lems thus shows the deleterious, alienating, and pathogenic effects of this structural inequality—call it violence—which discreetly imposes itself by making young people believe in a future full of promise, while they are held back and trapped in a system that banishes them. The education system itself then appears as an impassable stumbling block: "From the sixteen people I accompanied," writes Lems, "nobody managed to transition from the separated refugee-only classes to secondary schooling, and only a handful were able to gain access to regular apprenticeship." (22) The vast majority is channeled into the lowest-skilled segment of the job market. Abel once asked: "What is this here, a prison?"

While these are the imposed living conditions from which young asylum seekers cannot escape, they are, of course, not passive. This is one of the great merits of this book: it shows us how each of these young people, in his or her own way, responds to what happens to them, and still finds ways to make sense of it all. Meron, an Eritrean refugee, for example, was not only able to learn German, but he learned it well enough to retain jokes, habitual phrases, and behavior patterns that enabled him to appear more "included" than others. He put an enormous amount of work into it. He thus demonstrated great diligence and adaptability, qualities recognized and valued by the institutions. But also, it allowed him to make us of irony and discreetly be critical of the schooling system. This way, he preserved some kind of dignity while he managed to secure a full, four-year apprenticeship in plastics engineering. Others, like Thierno from Guinea, end up crushed by the anxious wait for an asylum decision, plagued by nagging doubts and the fear of being deported once they reach the age of 18. His dreams, hopes, and aspirations had vanished, making it impossible to look forward to a future in Switzerland. He stagnated, caught in a quagmire from which it seemed impossible to escape. In a state of deep exhaustion, "he had entirely lost trust in himself." (122) He retreated into seclusion, wearing heavy headphones day and night. Feelings of humiliation and disavowal took over as an invisible divide began to emerge between the lucky ones (those who had been granted refugee status) and the unlucky ones (those still waiting). "What can I say?" he asks (132) And yet, the pain that accompanies Thierno's feeling of being undesir-

able did not determine everything; he was able to resist actively and reassess in his own way the worth of his life. While Annika Lems "became heavily involved in Thierno's struggles for a dignified existence," he too became an actor again: he asked for legal advice by building links with refugee law activists and appealed to the Federal Administrative Court against the rejection of his asylum application. He also started a relationship with Binta, a young Fulani woman. "Bit by bit, Thierno managed to gather himself and cautiously recreate a sense of stability and hope." (144) His first child was born in Paris, while he waited for the decision, which soon came: his appeal was rejected and he was summoned to leave the country, which he did. He then went to France to live with Binta and their son.

One can hear through the book that these stories, like so many others, are "riddled with layers of concessions, self-denials, and disappointments." (79) They reveal what it takes to navigate such existential balancing, shifting from active attempts to make the world one's own to abandonment. This book is important because it clarifies what happens when these young people come up against the reality of an asylum system that harms them more than it protects them, notably by drastically reducing educational opportunities and the chances of advancing in their lives. "It shows that the prolonged waiting and hopelessness refugee youth are exposed to in Switzerland can be experienced as a form of violence surpassing the violence and chronic uncertainty that led them to leave their home countries in the first place." (29). That should give us something to think about.

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