Inner Dialogues: Negotiations Unfolding between the Field and one's Desk

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Abstract

This article is concerned with the inner dialogues around ethical dilemmas and concerns which unfold somewhere between the field and one's desk. It engages self-reflexively with how the subject of research is intimately connected with particular forms of representation and posits that it is especially ethnographic research on violence that renders the inherent premises and (com) promises of representation acutely tangible. Only seldom does the ethnographic story begin and end with the arrival and departure from the field. It is rather the case that the decision 'about how to write' does not develop linearly, is subject to shifts, and is often radically decentred at different points in time. In this article, I draw on my PhD research, conducted on the outskirts of Durban, South Africa, in which I became caught up in a series of hitman killings. When two of my main interlocutors were arrested for murder, I was confronted with the demand to make my ethnographic material available for the forthcoming trial. Taking this case as point of departure, I argue that, whilst significant efforts have been made to unravel the ethical tensions that define the everyday practice of doing field research, comparatively little conceptual work is available that engages with the nature of what we are doing when we write, the significance of ethical decision making therein, and how these unfold, leaving it to be something of a black box within research practice.

Inner Dialogues:
Negotiations Unfolding between the Field and one's Desk

Eva Riedke

Most anthropologists can readily recall ethical conundrums during fieldwork that result in moments of 'intellectual discomfort' (Fassin 2008: 333). Emanating from the reflexive turn, significant scholarly attention has been paid to unpacking the heuristic value of such moments in the field (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Gros, 2010; Holland 1999; van Maanen (2011) [1988]). It is through these experiences, so the argument, that anthropologists are encouraged to question what they work on, how they will write, and for whom (Abu-Lughod 1991, 157). However, a certain paradox persists: whilst significant attention has been paid to how discomforts during fieldwork are potentially productive, less attention has been paid to the processes of writing and the significance of that which appears emotionally, ethically, and analytically troubling for it. As I want to argue here, a certain image has been upheld whereby, once an anthropologist returns from the field, they will engage, over months if not years, with notes and transcripts, photos and newspaper clippings, will grapple with a series of complex questions around ethics and integrity, only to finally arrive at a decision over a suitable form of representation. What is only rarely addressed is that for only few researchers is this a linear process.[1] As the following account will render more concrete, ethical decisions – particularly regarding issues of responsibility and representation – are grounded in the very practice of writing. Decisions about how to write are frequently re-thought and often even questioned in their entirety. Here I want to engage specifically with the proposition that complex ethical concerns readily materialise during the writing process, whereby the dialogues that took place with actual people during the field research recede from view and a form of 'inner dialogue' takes over.

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1   Renato Rosaldo is a prominent exception, pointing readers of 'Grief and a Headhunter's Rage' to the non-linearity of the writing process that lay behind his texts. Years after his wife's death, Renato Rosaldo was still grieving, still filled with rage, describing how he longed for the 'Ilongot solution'. As he recounts:

not until some fifteen months after Michelle's death was I again able to begin writing anthropology. Writing the initial version of 'Grief and a Headhunter's Rage' was in fact cathartic, though perhaps not in the way one would imagine. Rather than following after the completed composition, the catharsis occurred beforehand. When the initial version of this introduction was most acutely on my mind, during the month before actually beginning to write, I felt diffusely depressed and ill with a fever. (Rosaldo 2004 [1989]: 171)

I thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

By reflecting critically on some of the uncomfortable moments at one's desk where the text becomes a site of representational struggles, my aim is to prize open a bit more that black box within which ethnographic writing has traditionally operated.

The paper begins with an account of a conflict that unfolded during my fieldwork and how I became witness to a series of contract killings. Once 'back home' and beginning to write, I grappled with a number of difficult decisions of how to compose my ethnography, through and through defined by the further trajectory of conflict and violence that unfolded in the township. My ethical deliberations in the process of writing shifted on numerous occasions, in particular the manner in which I experienced the responsibility of 'witnessing through writing' (McGranahan 2020, 13; see also Behar 1996). Shifting back and forth between the field and one's desk, a series of ruptures and breaks plays out that, as I want to argue here, seldom allows for the easy definition of a fixed narrative arc that can be typed up in a straightforward manner. Building on previous arguments made in relation to discomforts in the field (England 1994; Fabian 1990; Fassin 2013; Lather 2001; Nagar and Ali 2003; Pillow 2003; Visweswaran 1994), I suggest, first, that that which is 'messy, contingent and full of tensions' (Childers 2011, 347), including a sense of being 'in trouble', might in itself be useful and provide new empirical insights – rendering intelligible seemingly incomprehensible discourses and interpretations (Fassin 2008) as well as exposing the grids of unequal power relations characterising the process of ethnographic inquiry (Jacobs-Huey 2002). Second, I suggest that the acknowledgement that one may never in fact reach 'a comfortable, transcendent end-point' in the process of ethical decision making, and that practices of reflexivity might not always bring about the form of 'clarity' (Pillow 2003: 193, 192) that is readily assumed, may in itself serve as a marker of ethically valid practice (see also Lester and Anders 2018; Visweswaran 1994). A critical engagement with one's inner dialogues at the desk – wherein one experiences one's own ethnographic self as through and through 'multiple, unknowable and shifting' (Pillow 2003: 180) and as 'contingent, plural and shifting' (Rooke 2010: 38) – may constitute a move away from the 'comfortable uses of reflexivity' and a step towards drawing out what Pillow (2003: 175) termed 'uncomfortable reflexive practices'. As Lather (2001: 201) underscored: where authors grapple with the failures of representation and their texts become the sites thereof, these 'are not so much about solving the crisis of representation as about troubling the very claims to represent'.

Fieldwork somewhere outside of Durban

I conducted fieldwork for my PhD in a township on the outskirts of Durban, South Africa, between October 2011 and March 2012 and again be-

tween October 2012 and April 2013. For reasons that become clear below, I anonymised where I had conducted the fieldwork. Empirically, I focused on processes of 'issueification' by different 'publics', exploring how people come to collectively perceive the consequences of indirect actions that affect them, develop and define a form of 'affectedness' and, in turn, call publics into existence (Dewey 2012 [1927]; Marres 2012). Instances in which processes of issueification were rendered acutely tangible in recent years were, for example, the struggles around the transformation of the symbolic landscape in post-apartheid cities – pertaining to the renaming of street names, the removal of statues, and the erection of new ones. Tracing the trajectories of a series of very different issues that have figured prominently in the post-apartheid context, where they are negotiated and how, my research rendered tangible *sites* and *forms* of political participation that may not readily be considered as belonging to the settings of 'the political' (Dewey 2012 [1927]; Marres 2012; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006).

During my second phase of fieldwork, a conflict erupted in the township around a local housing project. New, fully state-funded houses were to be built in one section of the township for a select number of families who lived in dilapidated houses. These houses dated back to the creation of the township and had drastically deteriorated since. The local councillor set up a list of all households that were to receive a new house. As work on the construction site began, charges were made that the councillor had accepted bribes to replace the names on the list. These new names were names of people who had previously not qualified and, in part, were not even residents of the township. In response, a number of angered residents, including such on the original housing list, joined Abahlali base Mjondolo – a prominent shack dwellers' movement campaigning against evictions and for public housing – and began to protest against the corrupt allocation of the houses. In February 2013, a man living in one of the newly built houses was murdered. He was one of the beneficiaries alleged to have been allocated a house illegally. His was the first of six murders, all rumoured to have been carried out by paid hitmen.

From the first murder, I was caught up in what – drawing on Pieke (1995) – one can call 'accidental frontline anthropology'. Prior to the emergence of the conflict, I had upheld close field relations with the councillor, with those residents who had joined Abahlali and who were now protesting against corruption, and with a series of other key actors who, with time, became embroiled in the conflict, including local heads of the dominant political party, officers at the local police station, and representatives of local NGOs. The conflict worked to progressively endanger my existing social relationships: seeing that I had extensive relationships with actors who were now on different 'sides' of the conflict, residents began to question who I really was and what I was doing there. Conflicting rumours emerged concerning my past work in the township that began to put my own safety at risk. I had

to adapt my fieldwork practices in a context that was marked by heightened scepticism, vexing uncertainty, and existential disorientation on the part of many of my interlocutors. I developed a series of pragmatic, improvised field strategies, in particular to re-establish trust (see Riedke 2015). I took fewer notes during meetings, and if I did so at all, deliberately made them unreadable in a concern that they might be read by non-intended readers. Where I had often recorded conversations previously, I now only did so in very rare instances. I sought always to make transparent to my interlocutors *who* I had spoken to in the previous days and made sure to tell close contacts where I went, in the hope to invoke a sense of responsibility for my safety.

The first murder marked the beginning of emotionally, ethically, and analytically troubling times. I continued to uphold field relationships and invested time in weekly meetings with those who were in this period considered to be the perpetrators of violence. I felt compelled by what was a strange hybrid of pragmatism – in particular to maintain access to the field – and an urge to uphold a sense of transparency. Whilst I continued to meet with individuals on both sides of the conflict, and there was a readiness to engage with me, I was also frequently made to recognise that neutrality ceased to be a legitimate option. At a local party meeting that I attended, the councillor, in isiZulu, told the audience that there was an *impimpi* (a spy/colluder) present. It was clear to me and a close friend of mine that he was referring to me. The Abahlali protesters, in turn, were concerned with how I could help them and when I would fully 'join their struggle'. I was on occasion encouraged to accept 'proofs' that they had collected on the alleged corruption and fraud offences – including an original housing list to which they had gained access through an employee at the councillor's office, conversations they had recorded on their cell phones, emails that had been sent, and photographs that circulated. In all encounters I resolutely maintained that I could not accept this material, for not only would it jeopardise my own safety and that of my assistant but also, potentially, theirs.

Back home at the desk

I returned from South Africa in April 2013, after which many months of analysing, discussing, workshopping, and presenting of my material followed. I spent much of this time grappling with how I should write the ethnography I was preparing for. I was confronted with the emotional and psychological fall-out from having known some of the individuals who had been killed and encountered a deep unease with the transition from what Alison Rooke (2010: 26) described as the move 'from affective participant observation to a distanced writing up'. The distinction between 'field' and 'home', the trope of entry and exit – despite mostly being used playfully, parodically, and self-consciously – continues to function as an archetype of professional practice

for anthropologists today (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). It continues to be part of the 'fiction and normativity of traditional ethnography' (Rooke 2010, 30). Once 'back home', as Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997: 12) put it in the late 1990s, writing is perceived as being done 'in the academy, in libraries or studies, surrounded by other texts, in the midst of theoretical conversation with others of one's kind', where one's interlocutors no longer talk or peer over one's shoulder.

I share Johannes Fabian's impression that discussions of ethnographic writing still show a curious lack of engagement with how the disjunction between fieldwork and writing comes to have an undeniable impact on the practical aspects of writing, thus 'on the nature of what we are doing when we write' – not just on modes of representation but on the *praxis* of writing (Fabian 1990: 762, 756). Largely because this image remains uninterrogated and these two forms of activity continue to be seen not only as somewhat distinct but also as sequential to each other, particular experiences and forms of knowledge – namely, those collected in 'the field' – are privileged whilst others are somewhat 'blocked off' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 15). The latter include those experiences that unfold in the very process of writing, at one's desk. Paradoxically, it is often at the desk that we become acutely self-aware of the tensions and contradictions in our individual research fields, in which we engage with our own shifting subjectivities and in which we are able to study our so-called 'postcolonial self itself as a site where multiple centres of power inscribe' (Trinh, cited in Pillow 2003: 189).

Furthermore, it follows that where reflexive practices engage with ethically troubling moments whilst writing, they are posited and accepted as a method to 'work through'. The dominant, validated reflexive practices that at present have currency amongst qualitative researchers are framed as a methodological tool to take the author beyond the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged research, as providing a release from one's discomfort with representation (Pillow 2003: 187). Further, also an 'acceptance that coming to know oneself will aid in knowing, understanding, "witnessing", the other'. Rarely, however, does it appear legitimate to engage in a far less 'comforting' form of reflexivity, namely 'a reflexivity that seeks to know while at the same time situates this knowing as tenuous' (Pillow 2003: 176, 188).

When I began to write, I was drawn to the position of the witness. Distancing myself from the position of neutrality that I had initially sought to uphold during fieldwork, I now felt compelled to place the conflict centre stage and to help give voice to the lives of those who I saw as its victims, the Abahlali protesters. It was in the process of writing that I now sought to take a side. Problematic about 'siding' but also about placing the conflict centre stage was, in turn, the fact that I had done research on both sides of the conflict and also with those now considered to be the perpetrators of violence. I struggled with the question whether it was ethically justifiable

and epistemologically sound to now produce an ethnographic account that explored the acts of violence they were accused of having committed. Whilst it is no doubt not uncommon for ethnographic research to be done with the perpetrators of violence, in many cases these anthropologists have however set out to deliberately study violence and engage with those who stand behind it. In my case, events that were not initially considered germane to my research became part of it and violent conflict became the object of 'involuntary research' (Lee 1995). With a strange sense that I was engaging in a form of betrayal, I decided to use pseudonyms for the people I wrote about, though not for the place, hoping to produce a critical analysis and representation that would nevertheless be accessible and meaningful.

About eighteen months after returning from the field, Thandisile, who had been the chairperson of the Abahlali branch in the township and someone I had spent considerable time with, was assassinated in her home. Five months later, in February 2015, the local ward councillor and a leading ANC figure in the township were arrested for her murder. Rumours circulated that the two men had also been behind some of the previous murders. A few weeks later I received the first WhatsApp messages from my interlocutors asking me to 'join *their* struggle'.[2] They also asked whether I had any material – in particular recorded conversations with Thandisile, the councillor, police officers, heads of the political party – that could be used in the trial or be 'made public'. I felt a strong ethical responsibility to do so, for only a few months ago I had engaged in extensive conversations with them and yearned with them for arrests to happen. But my response was reasoned, explaining that primarily due to safety concerns I would not be able or, indeed, willing to provide access to my diaries, field notes, or recordings. I felt caught in a paradox: I knew too much about what had occurred and, at the same time, too little about where my knowledge would put me and others (see also Lather 2001: 204). Aware of my informants' struggle for self-representation and self-determination, the challenge for me was, as Kamala Visweswaran (1994, 80) formulated it, 'how does one act knowing what one does'?

There was no way of knowing at that point what value the stack of material, scattered in different mediums and formats across my desk, could have for the trial. Nevertheless, I feared what a potential subpoena could bring about.

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2   Alison Rooke's (2010: 30) suggestion that 'the field' must be seen as having fluctuating boundaries, as expanding and contracting at different times, appears pertinent to describe instances of 'crossing the boundaries' and experiences of 'being back in the field' – for example through WhatsApp conversations or phone calls with interlocutors – and valuable to transcend the disjunction between fieldwork and writing, field and home, and their assumed temporalities. Kirsten Hastrup (1992: 127) made a similar observation: 'the field world has neither a firm past nor a distinct future because its reality is intersubjectively constructed and depends on the ethnographer's presence in the field'.

Unedited, my interviews, notes, and recordings, if simply handed over, would have placed many of my interlocutors in extremely vulnerable situations. Of this I could be certain. But there were also less clear-cut concerns. At the risk of overestimating my role, I imagined audience(s) wider than just the specialists of my discipline that were keen to read what I would write. These possible audiences had a real implication for how I wrote (Descola 1996; Fassin 2013). Faced by these appeals to 'join *their* struggle', I felt forced not just to do the opposite but also to rewrite much of what I had already written. It was at this point that I anonymised the place of my fieldwork to such an extent that it merely became 'a township somewhere close to Durban' (see Vorhölter in this issue for a valuable, related discussion). Further, I laid a theoretical work on top of the stories told, which brought about another significant level of abstraction.

By rewriting the text and anonymising people and place, I sought to preserve a fine-grained, critically realist account of the practices by which actors and groups sought to identify a certain reality and render it unacceptable (Boltanski 2011). Hereby, the reality of domination would still be rendered visible, even if the individual actors remained unnamed. Anonymised ethnographies, indeed, even fictionalised ethnographies, in essence stake their story on a more fundamental problem, on the more general workings at play. Providing accounts of the everyday lives of activists, the grammar of the arguments invoked by local politicians, or the involvement of a community police force in disputes worked to render tangible some of the raw details of politically motivated killings that have continued to plague the province since before the end of apartheid.[3]

In conversations of mutual reflection with my interlocutors, my legitimisations for how I felt I was able or compelled to write – thus in a highly anonymised form – were partly met with consent and empathy but also with disappointed expectation. Indeed, some expressed concern and disappointment. 'What are you critiquing?', one informant challenged me. 'My critique towards you is that this is not critique! People should know what I fought for!' In rewriting texts and chapters that I had already written, I sought to explore a way of writing that George Marcus (1994) termed a 'messy text'. Experimenting with different textual strategies and pursuing a more unconventional narration – including stand-alone vignettes or lengthy dialogues – I sought to give the reader glimpses of my own autoethnographic work; my often privileged position, by gender, race, class, and nationality; and my feel-

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3   A prominent example of a fictionalised ethnography is Richard Rottenburg's (2009) *Far Fetched Facts: A Parable of Development Aid* in which he makes use of generic (ideal typical) consultants, financiers, implementing agents, and the like to tease out the central, underlying workings at play in the so-called 'game of development'.

ings about moving in and out of the text as an observer and an observed.[4] These, in part, allowed me to reveal the power inequalities that continue to underscore ethnographic fieldwork but also to point to contradictions, ambiguities, and incoherencies informing discourses and practices.

I spent a lot of time at my desk 'not writing', and part of my trouble was the difficulty of figuring out whether this was because I felt a deep unwillingness to write or whether it was an inability to do so (Fabian 1990: 769). The unease and apprehension I felt during this period of writing had a diffuse quality. They were at once intimately personal and psychological, rooted in my emotional investment in personal relationships with my interlocutors, and entangled with real or conceivable institutional and political risks. The Abahlali protesters had asked me to 'join *their* struggle'. They were convinced that my interviews and recorded conversations would be of great assistance in the trial and expected that my academic text(s) would disseminate 'the views of the marginalised' and speak to their struggle for self-representation. As I contemplated the commitment and responsibility towards my various subjects of research, I was unable to disentangle these from the legal concerns, physical stress, and academic pressure to write, publish, and perform.

The question posed by my interlocutors was, in essence, the following: 'for whom do you write?' Whereby, as Fassin (2013, 640) highlighted, the preposition 'for' in such instances does not refer so much to 'the public dissemination of the work as to its moral obligation: towards whom should we feel obliged?' He suggested further: 'carrying on an ethnography is cumulating debts. Making it into an intellectual production is repaying them – at least in part'. The creditors are many, and one is indebted to multiple groups 'in different ways and with an unequal weight' (Fassin 2013: 640). When I put my work into words, I sought to remain loyal to more than one side; and yet an uncomfortable sense of different, irreconcilable loyalties persisted. In the final draft of my PhD, I made this transparent, aiming for what Patti Lather (2001: 215) has termed a simultaneously 'both get[ting] in and out of the way'.

Ethical moments whilst writing

A key aspect that begins to emerge as one discusses the distinction between comfortable/uncomfortable reflexive practices and the 'black boxing' of what

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4   Wanda Pillow (2003: 193) emphasises how 'a desire for "honesty"' often 'dissolves into an up-front listing of the researcher's situated identities – a naming and marking of the researcher self'. In my example this would be: Caucasian, of German descent and working-class background, heterosexual, and feminist. The ability to 'disclose' one's own subjectivity in this manner rests on the assumption that one can be honest about oneself, particularly in relation to an Other. Feminist researchers have critiqued practices of (self)reflexivity that seek to demonstrate how the researcher truly knows themselves. Thereby feminists put into question where the researcher/author begins and ends in relation to the research and research subject.

we are doing when we write is a distinction between ethics as constituting a single moment at the outset of the research and ethics as made up of a series of ethical moments which arise throughout research and reach on into the writing up of the ethnography itself (Simpson 2011). Furthermore, it is seeing ethics not as a series of methodological decisions but as a material experience (Childers 2011). The emotional and intersubjective concerns I grappled with during the writing period point, to borrow from Marilys Guillemin and Lynn Gillam (2004), to the significance of 'ethics in practice' (vis-à-vis 'procedural ethics'): ethics is understood as grounded in the day-to-day practice of research and, in contrast to procedural ethics, also in events that may not be anticipated when applying for approval. Ethics in practice has an 'everyday' sort of quality to it. A useful term may also be 'micro ethics', underlining not that only little is at stake in (quite to the contrary) but rather pointing to the manner in which ethics remain grounded in day-to-day practice and are experienced at times as troubling, discomforting moments.

Although significant efforts have been made to effectively unravel more of the ethical tensions that are part of the everyday practice of doing research – particularly by critical and post-critical scholars – there is as yet little conceptual work that engages with the 'ethically important moments' (Guillemin and Gillam 2004: 262; Simpson 2011) whilst writing. My proposition is that ethically important moments, or indeed ethical dilemmas, do not end with a return from the field but carry forth and remain acute in the everyday doings at the desk. It is in the very process of writing that commitments to transparency, trustworthiness, and advocacy are complicated. Engagements continue to unfold with interlocutors (in my case through phone calls and WhatsApp conversations). At the same time, and less frequently acknowledged, is a tactical avoidance, or postponement, of 'full and open dialogue' to other occasions (Tedlock 1993: 370; see also Vorhölter in this issue).[5] The result is not seldom a form of inner dialogue, revolving around what research subjects and certain publics might have said, that in essence simulates a discussion and debate with these parties.

It might appear discomforting to acknowledge that such a form of dialogue unfolds when writing, sometimes initiated through actual communication with a 'real Other' (as in my case) but often without. 'Dialogue, perceived vaguely as an alternative to isolating or domineering monologue', emphasised Johannes Fabian (1990: 763), 'has been *en vogue* more than once during this century', so much so that forms of dialogue practiced in ethnographic research have received relatively little attention. Kevin Dwyer (1979) and Dennis Tedlock (1979, 1993) were two of the most prominent proponents of dialogue in anthropology. By opposing dialogical to monological, or analogi-

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5 The possibility for such an avoidance or postponement is put under question by the new communication technologies and forms of interconnectedness (Pelckmans 2009).

cal, anthropology, they argued that dialogue is not only central in the early phase of knowledge production but also generates a specific discourse in its later phases, up until completion of the written text (Fabian 1990: 764). In turn, inner dialogues, as I suggest, can – in the sequence of ethnographic knowledge production – be located as unfolding prominently in that space between the field and one's desk. Whilst, as Fabian (1990: 764) argued, critics of Dwyer and Tedlock inevitably 'put their teeth into the most palpable part of what is really a complex epistemological argument' and dismissed it too quickly as 'well-intentioned but utopian', it appears fruitful to pursue an exploration of the dialogical nature of ethnographic research, more specifically, as I posit here, to consider the significance of inner dialogues unfolding around ethical dilemmas and concerns, in part grounded in actual conversation and in part produced as we simulate conversations in our thoughts.

Concluding remarks

My decision of how to write did not develop linearly but was subject to shifts and, at different points, became radically decentred. Over time, I pursued different forms of anonymisation, all the while concerned that I needed to ensure the anonymity of my interlocutors whilst they still deserved acknowledgement. Anonymisation is far from a straightforward ethical practice. As Niamh Moore (2012: 332) has noted, 'for much of history anonymity did not protect the vulnerable' but rather created vulnerability 'by rendering people nameless'. It follows that the 'assumption of the universal/ist ethical good of anonymity' (Moore 2012: 331) is not readily tenable. In my case, through the decisions I felt compelled to make, anonymisation was accompanied by a process of abstraction, with my ethnographic material losing much of its situatedness. Though I experimented with different writing styles, the anonymisation nevertheless worked to separate data from place and (often) people.

Ethnographic writing has traditionally operated in something of a black box. Whilst a lot of attention has been paid to unpacking the black box in relation to ethnographic methods and fieldwork, particularly regarding ethics and integrity, less has been paid to ethnographic writing, even though the two are intricately related. Decisions over ethnographic representations continue to be treated as decisions that unfold linearly, as if a reflexive stance will result in a form of 'comfortable, transcendent end-point', to re-use Pillow's phrase. As feminist postcritical theorists have argued, it can be productive to set up 'disappointment as a rubric' (Lather 2012: 47) and, relevant to my concern here, to acknowledge the doubt and failure that shape how we try to tell other people's stories. As Sara Childers (2011: 247, 353) put it forcefully: 'foregrounding, rather than attempting to reconcile, that which is messy, contingent, and full of tensions', the dynamic interruptions and 'trouble' cre-

ated might 'help to generate a different practice and product of research'. It is in foregrounding the ruptures and breaks evidenced in our research that not merely negative cases are identified but that new empirical material emerges. The result envisioned is a somewhat less tidy form of writing, but one that provides more transparency about the difficulties of turning messy, uncomforting experiences into clean and comfortable scholarship (Tamas 2009: 18). Whilst ethnographers frequently think from positions that underline the heuristic value of discomforts, they do not always allow these discomforts to dictate their practice to the same degree.

Acknowledgements

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