I Said No

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ABSTRACT | Research is an always already whole-self endeavour. As researchers we do not get to choose what parts of us to leave behind at home when we go to work; this is especially clear in the doing of fieldwork. Additionally, what happens in "the field" does not stay there. In fact that is the point. We move between fieldwork and reflection at varying intervals; it is through this corrugated process that research emerges. Research institutions need to recognize and provide appropriate preparation and support systems for researchers when their work takes them outside of the institutions' walls. What follows is an account of the fieldwork experience that lead me to think about these dynamics of research and a window into those thoughts.

Keywords: Affective research; Fieldwork; Ethnographic Poetry; Trauma; Institutional Responsibility

I Said No

I said no, so many times.
For you this had no sense,
nor rhythm, nor reason, nor rhyme.
Yet I said no, so many times.

I accepted your generosity and kindness,
a leaky roof and warm food;
maybe it was a cause
of not wanting to be rude.
I've felt shame, guilt, dread,
confusion and anger,
and the warmth of a new friend
made out of a stranger.

You told us both
you never did anything
I didn't want.
And I agreed with you,
convincingly nonchalant.

I do not know if yours
were malicious intentions.
But you should know,
and here I will mention,
that it wasn't okay,
despite what I said right then.
Because I said no,
and you didn't listen.

You compared me to a prostitute;
did you think you were being cute?
They don't kiss either you said,
to keep distance, you know.

At that moment
I knew nothing more clearly
than why people trading access to their bodies
would draw that line.
Because I said no,
so many times.

'They' say hindsight is 20/20,
which I've never understood,
because 20/10 is twice as good.
Regardless, it's certainly fact,
that the present can have cataracts.

Postponing my feelings about the situation
surely contributed to my complacency.
And my intent to analyze with sterility
surely assisted my latency
in processing now
the events of there and then,
in writing here
as I'll surely do elsewhere again.

You respected neither me,
nor my work.
Not the rapport building,
nor the collection of bark.
Not the thought that went in,
nor the results that came out.
Not the vicariousness,
nor the enthusiasm throughout.

What is important to me
is that you learn to listen
to what people say to you,
specifically women.

Because, as you heard,
I repeatedly used
one specific word.

Many academic researchers, experienced and emerging, leave their home bases to conduct research, or undergo training, in "the field." That is to say, elsewhere, outside of the confines of the University. This work is often referred to as "fieldwork". The "you" in this poem is a man who, during the ethnobotanical fieldwork I conducted for my MSc research, came to have control over my transportation, food, water, shelter, and social connections. With that control he became an unwitting collaborator in my research, without whom it would likely not have been possible to access my research site or compile the dataset I was later told was "impressive". He also became a predator.

This poem was written some years ago, in a long moment of rage and fear. The pseudo-structure provided by my attempt at rhyming created a space in which I could write what I couldn't yet articulate either spoken or in prose. This recognition for me formed after hearing Marilyn Nelson speak on the New Yorker Poetry Podcast in July of 2020:

> I believe that formal constraints are such a tool for growth. They lead you to discover things you don't know, … and you set up some kind of a lens, let's say. You look through it and you see the world differently too. When your view is changed, your poem is changed. Your understanding is changed. Your wisdom is deepened (Young, 2020).

Today I write from a place where I feel safe. I move through a white settler dominated world with an educated, middle-class, white settler body; the research I refer to in the poem is completed and I am installed in a different institution on a different continent. Regardless, it still feels risky for me, a women, talking about heterosexual male behaviour, to tell my truth. I can only imagine the additional difficulty that would come with additional layered and intersecting vulnerabilities.

Though complicated by "what happened", that research was and remains dear to me. It nourished me while in process and continues to feed my thinking. I recognize and am grateful for the privilege of being able to do work that I love. Within this recognition, it is important to me to not diminish the pain and fear that has accompanied this work.

"You are not alone," I was told by gracious and well-meaning colleagues, instructors, and friends. When researchers conduct fieldwork, we are—often though not always—entering spaces we are not initially familiar with outside of the pre-reading we have done. And regardless of the extent of that reading, that which is captured in words, let alone that which is captured in words, disseminated, and made available to publics of which we are a part, will never be able to stand in for being-in-place.

Fieldwork is a form of showing up, of bringing ourselves to the research in a manner that removes us from our everyday. As Bianca Williams explains, "[f]ieldwork is a process that one submits to—sometimes throwing caution to the wind and pushing oneself to talk to people, go to locations, and navigate situations you would never openly embrace at home or in your everyday life" (Williams, 2017). Fieldwork is an immersive mind-body process, a highly personal experience and a necessary labour of primary data collection. With high stakes for researchers in the contexts of their careers, alongside the deeply personal nature of the work, fieldwork presents unique dynamics that can lead to vulnerable, challenging, and/or dangerous situations. While we may be asked to bring only the intellectual part of ourselves to the workplace (McGregor and Yousefi, 2017), we necessarily show up for fieldwork as our whole selves. While in the field we must drink, eat, sleep, travel, make friends, not make enemies, and conduct research.

This situation felt, in hindsight, of a type specific to the doing of research fieldwork. As researchers, when our research is so important to us the basic necessities

of fieldwork can overshadow the basic necessities of our wellbeing. As someone dedicated to completing fieldwork they traveled to a place to do, for their collaborators and for themselves, in a given window of time, usually (if not always) with resource constraints, these various necessities can come to defy Maslow's reasoning.

Maslow stated that "basic [human] needs arrange themselves in a fairly definite hierarchy on the basis of the principle of relative potency" (Maslow 1954: 97). These needs, he writes, in order of most to least potent, are as follows: physiological, safety, love, esteem, self-actualization (ibid: 98). Maslow and his hierarchy have been criticized for their foundation in individualist western thought as well as their inextricable ties to capitalist ideologies (Bouzenita and Boulanouar 2016). It is specifically for this reason that I cite Maslow, because the University too is founded in neoliberal capitalist ideologies of production (Mountz et al. 2015). From the perspective of the university system, into which an advance-through-the-ranks mentality is built, *esteem* and *self actualization* are the basic ingredients of higher education. With those basic ingredients, the production mentality inherent to the resource-constrained fieldwork trip creates a culture in which the needs of production come to dominate, as other fundamental psycho-physiological needs are asked to stand by. Or, as Williams pithily states, "[t]he demands of the job sometimes require us to throw caution to the wind" (Williams, 2017).

Before beginning to write up my MSc research, before knowing whether or not I would be able to do so, reading the prologue of Michelle Cocks's PhD thesis (2006), in which she writes, "during fieldwork…, a colleague and I were hijacked and brutally assaulted by a gang of criminals, who left us for dead in the bush," was invaluable for me. Reading that and seeing there were nearly 200 pages below it meant that she wrote, despite what happened, and that she neither ignored nor discredited her experience.

Making space for these stories, listening first, and responding thoughtfully are the first steps. The question I am asking now is, what is the next step of care needed to make research safe for all bodies? What is the next step of bringing our whole selves to this work?

In late 2019 I began collaborating with Jerika Heinze, founder of The Fieldwork Initiative, "a grassroots network of over 2,500 students and researchers facing trauma, unsafe conditions, or sexual harassment and assault during research fieldwork."[1] Our collaboration began from the basic agreed-upon premise that the explicit discussion of fieldwork dynamics and associated vulnerabilities, as well as the provision of support networks and resources, need to be a fundamental part of training early career researchers. That need is not being met. Researcher-producing institutions have not taken point on efforts to adequately prepare people for the complexities of fieldwork (Evans, 2017, Williams, 2017). This is something we hope to change. To echo Anya Evans's call:

> We are not weak, we do not need our hands held through fieldwork. We are powerful, qualified researchers ... We do not need to change fieldsites or give up our PhDs. But we do need our universities to advise and support us through the challenges of fieldwork, and react appropriately when we inform them of local hazards and their impact upon us (Evans 2017).

We perceive a gap in universities' responses to and organizing around trauma endured by researchers. Although much attention has been drawn to on-campus sexual harassment and assault, researchers' fieldwork experiences are often seen to reside outside the University's control and consequently beyond their purview. Thus, despite the fact that

fieldwork is an integral component of various degrees and research programs, trauma experienced in the field is implicitly categorized as a researcher's own personal problem that is meant to be handled privately (Kloß 2016). Attempting to fill this gap, Heinze and I hope to pilot a study investigating whether incidents of traumatic fieldwork experiences can be mitigated through destigmatized dialogue and the building of awareness and resilience, thereby removing barriers to positive experiences for fieldwork researchers. The study will chronicle the launch of a workshop for early career fieldwork researchers. The workshop will facilitate open discussion of fieldwork-specific dynamics and vulnerabilities. The primary goal of this workshop, and subsequently, of the pilot study, will be to ensure safer conditions for the greater research community and those with whom we work.

The vulnerabilities that emerge in the act of doing fieldwork are derived from structures of access and power that are often opaque for researchers who may not have been previously immersed in the place they are conducting research prior to arriving. People and systems unknown to the researcher can easily come to control their access to water, food, shelter, emotional support, their research site and collaborators, social connections, and transportation. And while that power can be wielded maliciously, or not, by the powerful, researchers need the skills to identify vulnerable situations and support for opting out. That support may be financial, procedural, and/or emotional. Congruently, mentors, supervising professors, and administrative staff must have the skills to respond compassionately and effectively to a researcher's disclosure.

Universities can make resources available for researchers to express concerns, find support, and receive immediate intervention whilst they are in the field. It would involve valuing affective labour and prioritizing access to scholarship for all bodies. This is possible and necessary, not just for fieldwork researchers but for all modes of inquiry housed in the University. This could be the next step of bringing our whole selves to work.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. http://fieldworkinitiative.org/about/

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