Sexuality and power on South African game farms; reflections on positionality and emotions in ethnographic research.

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Abstract

The taboo around researchers' sexualities and sexual experiences in ethnographic field work persists. We found that our sexuality, alongside physical and emotional experiences, were pivotal to how we shaped research relations and processes. This evokes questions around how we reflect on our positionalities and the knowledge we generate. We argue that ethnographic accounts are strengthened by inclusive reflexivity, that acknowledges sex and sexuality. This article presents empirical material from field experiences on South African game farms. These spaces tend to represent a particular image of wilderness, constructed according to patriarchal and racist hierarchies, which heighten contestations over belonging. As such they become spaces of violence, seduction, and power, and we found ourselves (neither minds nor bodies) unable to detach from these spatial and emotional dynamics. Our strategies for 'being in the field' came to evolve around negotiations of power, sex and complicity. The emotional dynamics made us feel confused, bewildered and sometimes scared. We seek to share our experiences and feelings, and to contribute to discussion on the role of sexuality in ethnographic research, and the epistemological, methodological and practical advantages of reflecting on the ways we engage in the field.

Keywords: sexuality, ethnography, game farms, South Africa, emotional dynamics

Introduction

This article explores the role of sexuality in ethnographic research and knowledge generation. We explore this topic through discussions of positionalities in relation to sexuality and power on South African game farms. Sex and sexuality 'in the field' has only recently been discussed by feminist scholars (e.g. Gune and Manuel 2007; England 2005; Elliston 2005; Katz 2005; Kobayashi 2005; Lerum 2001). Earlier ethnographic work tends to be focused on the sexuality of 'Others' (Malinowski and Havelock 2005 [1929]) or provide accounts of non-reflexive personal sexual encounters in the field (Rabinow 1977): none of which deals with sex and sexuality as part of the research process. Our focus lies on how sexual relationships and sexualities shape how we interact with research participants, and how these dynamics influence how we 'do' field work and what we come to know about a place and the people in it. We particularly hope this discussion will assist researchers preparing for ethnographic field work. There is much to gain by reflecting on these aspects of positionality, especially for those engaging in field work for the first time. We draw from empirical research materials to analyse how reflections on sexuality enable insights into the workings of power on South African game farms, and the process of knowledge production.

Our contribution draws on debates across sociology, anthropology and human geography, e.g. flirting in the field (Kaspar and Landolt 2016), gatekeeper-researcher relationships (Reeves 2010), power dynamics (Naples 2003, Skeggs 2001), falling in love and having love affairs in the field (Cupples 2002, Hapke and Ayyankeril 2001, Newton 1993), issues of gender and race (Faria and Mollet 2016; Ahmed 2007; Gurney 1985), and the multiple aspects of positionality, positioning, and power in the field (Lerum 2001; Rose 1997; Duncan 1996). Despite these knowledges, we experience a persistence of assumed asexuality and emotional detachment in the field which begs the question whether scholarship has really moved beyond normalised 'objectivity'. Personally, we have been advised by supervisors and colleagues to maintain emotional and physical distance to our research and research participants, to avoid being clouded by emotions or subjectivity. Hence it is important to discuss how the expected detachment results in difficulties in navigating the field.

Preparing this article has been a lengthy and emotional process. It started in 2011 as a private discussion between the two of us after a series of workshops linked to our research project. We shared what Bondi (in Davidson et al. 2005) call the emotionality of our experiences; particularly around the relationships with men in our field sites (trophy-

hunting farms). We both felt an awkward mix of being excited and deeply troubled by our field work experiences and relationships (discussed by Kaspar and Landolt 2016). Our ambivalent and awkward feelings were inextricably linked to our positionalities: young, white, foreign (European) women, both navigating a male-dominated and violent research context. When we felt emotionally overwhelmed by our experiences we thought there was something wrong with us. We should not, or so we thought, as researchers allow ourselves to be so emotional and attached. Field workers are supposed to maintain critical distance. The boundaries that *we thought should* exist between our professional and personal selves became blurred and we raised this within our academic community, few were interested in unpacking these particular aspects of field work.

A few years later we decided to write about the silences that were bothering us and made us question the whole idea of doing research, and at times ourselves. Since then we have engaged with a multitude of articles, books, seminars and discussions related to this topic. These have inspired our writing as well as our framing of this particular article, and we have a rich body of literature that has helped us to make sense of our field work experiences. As part of the writing-process, we have presented on this topic on numerous occasions. Many ethnographers share similar experiences and anxieties, and that many students about to embark on field work have questions about sex and sexuality in the field. There is indeed a silence and a taboo, but also a desire and need to address this.

Landscapes of power: silencing sex and sexuality in the field

We conducted field work on game farms in South Africa, in the provinces of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, as part of a research project on the conversion of cattle farms into privately-run game farms, and the impacts of these conversions on farm workers and farm dwellers. We focused on the experiences and stories of black farm labour, and interpreted them in the context of contestations over land, nature, labour, identity and belonging (Brandt and Spierenburg 2014; Josefsson 2014). We also engaged with game farmers, trophy hunters, professional hunters, and game rangers, who turned out to have a significant impact on our access to the field and our research.

A range of literatures address specific aspects of the messiness, complexities, and politics of the research process. Kaspar and Landolt (2016) suggests that "the invocation and enactment of sexuality is far more common than is reflected in the current body of literature, and that even "apparently innocuous sexualisations have considerable effect on the way gender and sexuality are negotiated during the research encounter, and thus on the collection of data" (p108). Rose (1997) has been helpful in our understanding of positionality. For reflexivity and reflexive writing, we turned to Punch (2012) and

DeLyser and Starrs (2001). Feminist scholars and feminist ethnography addressing power dynamics and the processes that make up research have certainly shaped our thinking (like Naples, 2003, Skeggs 2001, and Coffey 1999). Scholarly work on intersectionality (Yuval-Davis 2006; McCall 2005) has also been useful for reflecting on the relational dynamics in our respective fields. It allows us to consider the cross-cutting issues of race, class, gender and sexuality, and the hierarchies of power in which they operate. In our particular research context, the dynamics of sex and sexuality lie close to racial dynamics and the power of whiteness (as discussed by Faria and Mollet 2016) that shape realities and landscapes of power. Our field work accounts provide an empirical and contextualised illustration of this process, and we extend the debate on concerns around the silencing of this topic during all phases of the research (also discussed by Cupples 2002).

We are not the first researchers to experience the silencing of sexuality and emotions in field work research. Edited volumes like *Taboo* (Kulick and Wilson 1995) have engaged with questions about sex and erotic subjectivities in field work, and the resistance to and/or lack of engagement regarding this topic. Several authors in the special issue "The Stickiness of Emotions in the Field" (Gender, Place and Culture, 2016) have noted the same thing, see for example Faria and Mollett (2016) and Kaspar and Landolt (2016). *Emotional Geographies* (Davidson, Bondi, Smith, 2005) and the follow up publication *Emotion, Place and Culture* (Smith et al. 2009), focused on the place of emotions in research. Bondi (2005) argues that emotions do not necessarily have to be the subject of every study, but they can at least be more usefully included in reflections and analyses. Studying Jewish belonging, anthropologist Markowitz (2006) uses "full-bodied ethnography" (a term she attributes to Karla Poewe) to destabilize cultural categories and fixed notions of race and ethnicity. In an edited volume with Ashkenazi (Ashkenazi and Markowitz 1999) they call for attention to embodied parts of field work, including sex and sexualities to demystify the process of doing fieldwork as well as the processes of negotiation happening before, during and afterwards.

In *After Method*, Law (2004) assumes that researchers inherently enact and generate social realities. In his own words, research does not require: "to seek disengagement but rather how to engage. It is about how to make good differences in circumstances where reality is both unknowable and generative (2004: 7)." 'Doing' ethnography is a deeply personal and relational experience *and* practice and therefore we can only strengthen our positions by reflecting on who we are and what we do in the field to enhance the credibility of our ethnographic accounts. Our methods are about ways of working and ways of being. It is about what kinds of social science we want to practice (Law 2004). For us this includes what we are feeling and how our methods interact with our minds

and bodies. Davidson and Milligan (2004:425) describe emotions as interrelational: "our sense of who and what we are is continually (re)shaped by how we *feel*". So what does it mean when we feel discomfort or pleasure about the relational dynamics in ethnographic research? Why do the ways we carry out ethnographic field work invoke feelings of guilt, shame and concern? Why would transparency regarding the research dynamics compromise our data or our competence as researchers, as has been suggested to us?

It seems there is still an assumption that we should be 'objective' (meaning detached, asexual and apolitical) researchers in the field, whose personalities, experiences, feelings and sexualities do not shape, nor can be separated from, our research relations and the way we interpret field processes (Gune and Manuel 2007). Law unpacks this so-called objectivity using Donna Haraway's work as a lens (Haraway 1991 in Law 2004), saying that how we try to be objective is usually by attempting to practise detachment and disentanglement from location. They both argue that this is never possible, with which we agree. Rather, the notion of objectivity is undermining to ethnography; it contributes to the silencing of our emotions as well as the assumption that sexual relations in the field compromise the research. Scholars like Kulick and Wilson (1995) and Cupples (2002) make clear from the start that it is simply odd to think that sexuality is not part of the field work process, for we enter places and interact with spaces with our bodies and minds, and not only with our research skills and ideas:

> For individual "fieldworkers...sexual desire in the field can call into question the boundaries of self, threaten to upset the researcher-researched relation, blur the line between professional role and personal life, and provoke questions about power, exploitation and racism. All of this can be extremely difficult and anxiety-provoking. But instead of sealing it with the stamp of 'Unethical' and flinging it away to the extreme periphery of the discipline, as has been done until now, perhaps the time has come to acknowledge and explore it, not out of narcissism or a desire to gaze at navels, but, rather as part of our ongoing critical enquiries into the basis for, and the production of, our knowledge" (Kulick, 1995: 12).

In a similar vein, Cupples (2002: 388) affirms that engagement with sex and sexuality "can help us to be aware of moments and spaces when oppressive power relations are unwittingly being reproduced and enable us to work with paradox and contradiction more fruitfully". Cupples takes on the seductive qualities of the field work process and our relationship to the field itself. It is exciting to 'be' in a different context, outside of our comfort zones (Cupples, 2002). This allows us to explore ourselves as well, and to act and be in ways we would perhaps not do at home (see DeLyser and Starrs, 2001). Moreover, when we are away from home and spaces of familiarity, especially in cross-

cultural field work settings, our sexual subjectivities are more likely to shift. Exploring these shifts is a way of "understanding the multiple repositionings of self that take place during the course of field work and a way of acknowledging our positionality as embodied researchers" (Cupples 2002: 382).

In her review of critical reflexivity and sexuality studies in anthropology Elliston (2005: 44) draw's on Newton's 'Best Informant's Dress' (1993) to state what is at stake when we continue to negate ethnographer's' sexuality: fortifying subject positions of heterosexual male anthropologists. In line with Kulick she furthermore writes that "the theoretical ramifications of attending to ethnographers' sexuality thus opens into questions of power, of the hierarchies of difference on which ethnographic knowledge has been built and which sustain inequalities not only in the field but also "at home", in the contexts of reception of anthropological texts, including the academy." Critical reflexivity on our positionalities helps to produce ethnographic knowledge "less wedded to hierarchies but for producing social justice." (2005: 44). If we consider the field as a landscape of power, we find that the taboo and silencing of researchers' sexual experiences and sexualities can be as limiting as assumptions about objectivity. Notions that dictate how we are expected to behave and how to react (or not). They form part of the hierarchies of power that we try to navigate, and thus they influence ethnographic knowledge.

The South African game farm

Before situating ourselves and our experiences with sex and sexuality in our field sites, we provide a brief outline of the power relations as well as other common characteristics of the South African game farm. These are explicitly tied to racial hierarchies as well as patriarchal and paternalistic relationships; and to histories of contestations over belonging (Brandt and Spierenburg 2014; Josefsson 2014; Brandt 2016). Colonialism and apartheid institutionalised white-minority rule, including strict control over people's mobility, spatiality, and sexual behaviour through the infamous Immorality Act of 1950, a key component of apartheid legislation (Ratele 2009). Historically, white farmers negotiated labour arrangements with black men who gained access to land in exchange for their labour, including the labour power of their wives and children. This was a system of extreme inequality and dispossession, which contributed to the violence against black women on farms that persists until today (Mda 2004; Waldman & Ntsedi in Mkhize, 2012: 37-38). Land ownership patterns in South Africa, now more than twenty years after 'the fall' of apartheid, still remain extremely skewed (Walker 2014). Despite the African National Congress's (ANC) land reform and transformation promises, white South Africans continue to own the majority of agricultural land and dominate the sector.

Land tenure for black people and farm workers remains highly insecure (Mkhize 2012) and has arguably become worse under the post-apartheid ANC-led governments, in essence due to the ruling party's advancement of neoliberal economic policies (Wesso 2013). In the post-apartheid condition, relations in the countryside are characterised by extreme violence, distrust and hatred (Steinberg 2002). Farm relations on white-owned farms are described by Du Toit (1993) as 'authoritarian paternalism', which is upheld by an informal understanding of economic and personalised interdependencies whereby the farmer's judgement and will ultimately prevails.

Game farms are privately-owned wilderness spaces, often white-owned cattle farms that have been converted for the purposes of wildlife production, like trophy hunting and so-called eco-tourism (Josefsson 2014; Brandt and Spierenburg 2014). The landscapes are often constructed around conservationist ideals and authority. Trophy hunting discourses in particular can be read as a sexually charged activity where animals, women and weapons are "interchangeable sexual bodies in narratives of traditional masculinity" (Kalof et al. 2004: 237). This manifests in the ways sports hunters portray themselves with their trophies and the ways in which the hunt is experienced. In Emel's article (1995) on wolf eradication and ecofeminism we observe very similar masculinity traits related to the killing of wolves and maintenance of ideals of manhood. The men featuring in both articles draw on typical characteristics of heterosexual male sexuality to describe hunting and killing: predation, chase, anticipation, desire, excitement, and climax. This vocabulary is similar to how some men experience pursuing sex with women (Kalof et al. 2004). The masculinities often associated with nature conservation and trophy-hunting fit well with Kalof's (2004) and Emel's (1995) analyses, and game farms are constructed around similar tropes, making them spaces of sex, seduction, danger and violence.

Game farms often perpetuate images of pristine African landscapes and the 'great white hunter' accompanied by black subordinates (Josefsson 2014). White notions of attachment to land and wilderness remain the dominant narrative, and black people's relations to the land are concealed and dismissed (Brandt 2016; Josefsson 2014,). Instead they are incorporated into the whitened spaces as trackers, general farm labourers and domestic workers (Brandt 2013; Kalof et al. 2004). The colonial origins of these constructs are well-documented (Wels 2015; Josefsson 2014; Hughes 2010; Neumann 2000). As Ndebele observed, the South-African game lodge is a place where "those who have lost power regain their sense of its possession" (1997:99-101), an insight shared by Josefsson (2014). The desire to save African nature is linked to preserving a "certain idea and sense of control over a masculine type of wilderness landscape" (Wels 2015: 77). It is in these landscapes of power that our experiences and stories are situated.

Our stories

We have chosen to share personal stories from our fields that describe field work relationships in which we felt that sex and sexuality influenced the (re)shaping of our own as well as other's positionalities; and ultimately generated insights in claims of belonging and power dynamics on game farms. For this we draw on our field notes comprised of empirical observations and day-to-day reflections from the field. Jenny's story is about the relationship that developed between her and 'Khanda'[1], who worked with her as a research assistant and interpreter. Their relationship contributed to Jenny questioning both herself and her research, but it also helped her feel a sense of belonging in a difficult fieldwork context. Femke describes how she had to negotiate access to places and people through game farmers and trophy hunters, and how generating data became emotionally unbearable, leaving her feeling powerless at times, and in the end, complicit. Both stories speak to how we compromised ourselves, for example by tolerating behaviour we otherwise would not accept, or placing ourselves in situations that were intimidating and potentially harmful. They also speak to the enjoyment and pleasure we got from our experiences, and how we came to re-evaluate ourselves in terms of researchers in the field.

Jenny's story

When I started my PhD field work I already had field experience from wilderness spaces in nearby areas. I had been subjected to threats, intimidation and being refused access to sites and people due to disagreements with gate keepers and land owners. Based on this I thought it best to hide certain aspects of myself, for example that I am a feminist and a vegetarian, to establish friction-free relationships in the field. So this time I tried to appear apolitical and 'neutral'. I thought it would be less emotionally draining. But my strategy did not work. I could not maintain the role I had prescribed for myself. I felt betrayed by my emotions and my body, and I felt like a failure for allowing this to happen.

My field work stretched over a period of two years, with frequent interruptions through visiting home, which at the time was Cape Town, though I am originally from Sweden. It was mostly based on interviews and participant observation on game farms in a rural part of KwaZulu-Natal. In the beginning my gatekeeper, someone I already knew, introduced me to game farmers and potential case study sites. Being escorted by him, also a white man, made a big difference in terms of easing the initial access to the field and obtaining legitimacy for my presence. His family welcomed me in their home, providing me with a

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[1] 'Khanda' is a pseudonym. He has given consent to Jenny to write this story.

safe space and he was the one who introduced me to Khanda. I needed an interpreter and guide, so I hired Khanda to help with my field work. As it turned out, it was easy for Khanda and I to become friends; we both talk a lot, we are opinionated, we like to argue and make jokes, and we prefer brutal honesty to diplomacy.

Khanda is the only black historical tour guide in the area. The other tour guides are white men and the historical narrative is dominated by settler- and military histories. Khanda is trying to represent different interpretations, which at times causes tension with the other guides. Adding to this tension is his reputation of having relationships with white women. He was convinced that it triggered anger and resentment in some people, and envy and admiration in others. He said he mostly did not bother with the reactions of other people and that he enjoyed the attention, especially if it provoked white people. But at times he felt anger and frustration.

We both enjoyed the freedom of our conversations and the close relationship we formed around sharing thoughts and experiences of sex and sexuality. The sexual tension between us grew stronger and at times it was very distracting. He was convinced that we would and should have sex, but I was hesitant for several reasons, especially when I was still in a monogamous relationship. Others also noticed our intimacy and we would sometimes reflect on our relationship in terms of how we thought others perceived it. For example, the reactions of white men when they saw me, a white woman who was not local, often resulted in curious stares and flirtatious comments. Their facial expressions would change in a split second when they saw Khanda next to me, and many made disapproving comments. This really bothered me, and I often felt the need to hold my head high and stare back at them. But sometimes I also enjoyed these encounters. It felt as if I was challenging conservative and racist ideas about sexual identities and belonging. Evidently, my attitude was not apolitical in these situations.

Not only white men reacted to seeing us together. Interracial relationships are still rare in South Africa, especially outside the large urban centres. African men quite often made very explicit sexual remarks about me, or about us as a couple. The first time I asked Khanda to translate what this one man was shouting at us as we drove past him, Khanda said "The guy said he wish he had a white woman to clean his pipes". I was taken aback by this comment, and after this event I made a habit of asking for a translation when someone shouted at Khanda or us, and very often the comments involved sex, sex with me, and that I am a white woman. Another man that Khanda only vaguely knew told him over the phone that he should "bend me over the car and fuck me". Instead of being infuriated and intimidated I just accepted this. I because my sense of 'normal' and acceptable behaviour had already shifted; it was part of being in the field and adjusting to

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gender and racial norms that were different from my life at home. Moreover, being associated with Khanda was important for my sense of belonging and safety in the field. Our relationship was exciting and intense, and I felt comfortable around him. The relationship changed my positionality in relation to my 'normal' self. It allowed and pushed me to compromise and comply, but also to explore the aspects and feelings it evoked.

Khanda's presence often made access and interviews easier for me. Being accompanied by a man provided legitimacy. Research participants frequently pointed out that as a woman I should not be traveling alone. But there were also times when Khanda and I felt like his presence presented an obstacle to the interview, in particular with game farmers. They tended to be more relaxed and open if I was doing the interview alone. They would flirt, attempt to get me drunk, touch my body, and ask about my personal life, but not when Khanda was with me. It was a constant dilemma for me: do I expose myself to this behaviour and get 'better' interviews, or do I bring Khanda as protection at the cost of the interview? Another strategy was to say that my gatekeeper and his family were expecting me so that I had an acceptable excuse to leave uncomfortable situations. I used another man's authority to negotiate the feelings of the men trying to get me drunk and stay the night. In my experience, this was far more effective and less offensive than me saying 'no, I don't want to'.

I found the field in general and the intimate space Khanda and I shared very seductive. I asked myself why I felt so strangely empowered and liberated, and whether I was not exoticizing 'others'? The way I think about it now is that our relationship was inextricably linked to the contexts of the game farms. The constant emotional and political negotiations made it necessary to shift my sense of self in order to fit in. On the farm I was the exotic other, to Khanda and to other men. In this, Khanda became my safe space, and to some extent I became his. Secondly, this allowed me to explore and enjoy taboos. I often think of this as a dilemma of power - is my relationship with the field exploitative? I can go into the field and seduce, or allow myself to be seduced, and then leave and return to my everyday life? This interpretation however fails to consider any form of agency or gain for the research participants or for Khanda. In terms of our personal relationship, I felt very strongly from the beginning that I did not want to become one of his white women. It felt as if other people were to perceive me as yet another conquest, I would lose my legitimacy and objectivity. My emotional and practical solution was that I decided not have sex with him, even though I wanted to.

To cope with the emotional difficulties that emerged from the field I took shelter behind my role as a researcher, and placed a filter between myself and the sexist comments.

Together with Femke, I developed an academic interest in exploring my field relationships. I created a professional distance between myself and my field as a sexualized space. However, I later realised that it did affect me deeply, and at times I felt disgusted and ashamed for not standing up for myself.

Femke's story

This story is about how I became entangled and complicit in power relations on trophy-hunting farms in the process of building relationships with game farmers in the Karoo. The farmers were all white men, which was at the core of the way sexuality shaped our relationships within the local hierarchies. This was not my first experience of living and doing research in South Africa, so I was somewhat familiar with the spatialized inequalities and antagonistic social relations. In the Karoo, however, these tensions seem exacerbated perhaps due to the small scale of the farming communities, and that the farms are remote and vast. The moment I arrived in the town where I was going to live for a year, I was received by my white hosts from whom I rented a house. They linked me up with farmers they knew, and I followed this trajectory to get a sense of who owned and managed trophy-hunting farms in the area. At this stage, my attitude was essentially to be open and engage with anyone who was willing to help me find my way. So I ended up building relationships with commercial white farmers, although the research project focused on the consequences of farm conversions for black farm workers.

The negotiations to access heavily fenced-off and remote hunting farms took place with the men who controlled access and movements on the farms. Initially they welcomed me generously and it was fairly easy to establish relationships. They saw me as nonthreatening and apolitical, and not in a position to challenge their authority or ideas. They eagerly shared their knowledge and displayed their superior position by instructing me how to behave on and make sense of the farm. They drove me through the farms to show me *their* animals and land. This self-perception of being masters of the space and its inhabitants showed how important the land was for their sense of belonging; to meet a farmer you have to meet the land. I was invited on walks, drives, and once a helicopter flight, and it felt like exciting and unique opportunities.

While participating in hunting trips, game capturing activities or drives I felt dependent on them for access and safety. On one occasion a veterinarian asked me to press on the vein of a sedated white rhino so he could take blood samples. With my hand on her thick skin I could feel her incredible will and muscle power as she kept trying to stand up and escape. Afterwards, my legs were shaking and the adrenaline rushed through my body. The veterinarian had told me that if she got up she would most likely run away instead of

coming after us, but I was not so sure of that. He however acted as if in complete control. These intimate encounters provided opportunities to ask questions and observe, and the men were able to confirm their knowledge and attachment to the place. They spent much more time telling me about things important to them than discussing I wanted to know; for example their thoughts on land reform and labour relations. Through this I learned what was important to them, and the reality they wanted to share with me.

My sexuality was constantly scrutinised. The general perception was that I had come 'alone' and was 'single', despite the fact that I explained that I was in a relationship with a man in the Netherlands. I was often asked "where is your man" or "don't you miss your family?" as living and working independently as a white woman is uncommon. Farmers and white men in general wanted to take care of me. They gave advice such as, "you would not sleep with [black] people from the township right, you know about AIDS?" Others perceived me as a potential lover and never gave up trying to date me. One of the professional hunters repeatedly came to my house and asked me out for a coffee. I said no, though it was hard to avoid him in the small town. Once I was invited to a *braai* (barbecue) on a farm where I was told to accompany the farmer's son on a night hunt. We both felt awkward and didn't talk much, and afterwards we made sure no one would think that anything had happened between us. The assumptions that I wanted to date or get attention from these men helped me negotiate access and establish relationships, but at times it presented me with a dilemma. For example when I stayed late on a farm, and the farmer wanted me to stay over. I felt conflicted about wanting to maintain the research relationship, and not wanting to be desired as a woman. I felt as if both the men and I crossed the boundaries of what I was willing to give in terms of my emotional involvement.

There was a constant tension between me and the farmers about my presence and the purpose of my study. Their main concern was that I would be an animal- or environmental activist, because there is a strong lobby of wealthy people focusing on these issues. One man joked that if he found out I was a 'greenie' he would shoot me. I convinced the farmers that I was not a 'bunny hugger' and that my vegetarianism did not mean I objected to hunting or eating meat. We found common ground when I told stories of my grandfather in the Netherlands, who was a well-known local poacher, and of my experiences with hunting at home. My nationality and foreign-ness lead to comments like "it helps that you are not South African, they are biased" and "it is *your* grandfathers who came here to colonise the land". Farmers seemed to perceive me as both strange and familiar, just like they were both strange and familiar to me. I felt as if they projected their uneasy positionality, as white beneficiaries of structural inequalities in South Africa, by drawing me into their issues of belonging. I was also perceived as a blank

slate ready to be taught how to see from their point of view, and join their side.

With time it got easier to discuss topics like land and labour relations with some of the farmers. Since farm workers often reside on properties of white owners, with whom access must be negotiated, my relationship with farm workers was always fragile. In cases where farmers allowed me to engage with farm workers on the farm, they assumed that my relationships with the workers would not challenge their authority or ideas. The workers were often uncomfortable talking to me while the farmer was around, and sometimes they wanted to ask permission to engage with me. Building relationships with workers changed me and my positionality significantly. I learned about different realities, and started to see and feel the injustices and violence on the farms. I felt increasingly uncomfortable and struggled with maintaining the image of not having a position or choosing sides. I believed that as a researcher I was not supposed to do this.

Overall however, farmers seemingly enjoyed my presence and interest in them. Sexualized comments, jokes and gestures were common, and I allowed this as it seemed a requirement for my presence. I ignored my feelings of disgust and anger, as well as the discomfort with being dependent on them. They used sex and sexuality to affirm their power over me, like they affirm their dominance over women, black workers, wildlife and nature, and I was pulled into their world. Witnessing the racism and violence towards workers and animals made me feel angry, but I did not know what to do about it, or if I was in a position to do anything at all. I felt I had to choose between remaining in this space and be complicit, or leave completely. At the same time staying developed my understanding of how racism and patriarchy are performed on the farms.

I dealt with the relational dynamics by giving farmers space to show me their world and suppressing my own ideas, objections and emotions. This was my way of establishing emotional boundaries and coping with the violent relations on farms. I pretended that I did not have to choose a position, and that it was not up to me to fight the injustices. Outside of the farms however, I supported people who were challenging the power imbalances, like the local advice office that handled workers' cases. But this approach only worked temporarily. When I returned from farm visits and wrote field notes, I often cried and once got so physically unwell that I vomited and I considered quitting. Only in my private space I allowed myself to feel the violent forms of appropriation and authority, including my ambivalent feelings towards my participation and complicity.

Discussion

By telling our stories of how sexuality shaped our field work relations, our positionings

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and research processes we enable two things. Firstly, it provides insights into emotional dynamics of power and belonging in South Africa's game farming landscape. Secondly, it demystifies fieldwork, or at least some aspects of it, as the main source of knowledge generation in our research processes. Through our minds and bodies we experienced the game farm as a power-laden and emotional space, with deep and painful contestations over land, identity and belonging. Hunting and conservation itself turned out to be highly emotive practices. We encountered farmers' and hunters' feelings of fear and anxiety about their legitimacy as land owners, their relations to black workers, masculine prowess, and anger about land reform or animal activists. For us, being in this space meant playing on and having to deal with these dynamics, including its sexualized dimensions. For example, we were both challanged to approach wildlife on foot and show bravery, while not carrying rifles like the men. We were seated physically close to the hunters and farmers inside their vehicles, and while walking in "the bush", they whispered close to our ears as to not alert the wildlife. Without experiencing this with our own bodies we would have generated different results and knowledge. We got to know the space through the feelings and emotions it provoked. Knowing the game farming landscape means understanding our sense of the place, the experience of being there, and interacting with its dynamics and participants.

Femke's strangeness-familiarity dynamic and Jenny's sense of belonging through an intimate relationship were deliberate and unintentional at the same time. Living and acting in these dynamics made us question ourselves and who we thought we were. Or rather, how we thought we should position and locate ourselves as researchers in the field. The times we surrendered ourselves to expectations that we disagreed with, we often felt guilt, shame and disgust. At other times we felt pleasure and excitement. These ambivalences and contradictions taught us about the ways in which South Africa's game farming landscape perpetuates racist and sexist hierarchies. They also taught us about our preconceived notions regarding how we carry out field work. Farmers, land owners, and hunters tried to locate us where they believed we belonged, just like they do with workers and wildlife.

Within these spaces, we experienced how masculinities were cultivated, how African landscapes and wildlife are eroticized, and how white men in particular maintain a position of power, and re-assert their sense of belonging in landscapes constructed around hunting, wilderness, manhood and domination (Hughes, 2010; Josefsson 2014; Wels, 2015). In the process of establishing relationships with people in our fields, it mattered a great deal how we were perceived (also see Hapke and Ayyankeril, 2001); as white women, as foreigners, as sexually available, or as converts to claims of belonging and legitimacy. Both of us depended a great deal on men for access and safety. They

became our gatekeepers, protectors, and research participants. We interpret their willingness to resort to violent behaviour as indicative of the extremely violent relations in the post-apartheid landscape as a whole. This pending threat resulted in difficulties with negotiating the relationship with gatekeepers, the integrity of ourselves, and other research participants (see also Reeves 2010). It was balancing act in which we performed a sexual and racial belonging, which was both imposed on and enacted by us.

We constantly negotiated the sexualized dimensions of our research relationships; sometimes feeling excited and other times violated. Femke complimented, teased and allowed men to guide her, both intellectually and physically, through the hunting field, and she often complied with their expectations. In the beginning, Jenny consciously tried to assume an asexual and apolitical attitude. At the same time she experienced an intense sexual tension with Khanda which was perceived as a challenge to the local power configuration as many other research participants either disapproved of so-called interracial sexuality, or at least found it strange. All this pushed our boundaries of what we defined as acceptable. By being there, we challenged and asserted men's authority in the space where at times we felt we had no choice but to suppress our feelings to comply or remain silent about injustices we witnessed or behaviour we disliked; like being photographed as part of the trophy or receiving sexist comments. Our stories illustrate how we sometimes felt powerless and sometimes felt in control and often anything in between these extremes. More importantly it shows how researchers are complicit in power configurations and need to discuss how we deal with this, how we engage with the realities we generate and study (Law 2004). Reflecting on how we have done research and how that worked out might result in making different choices in future.

Kaspar and Landolt's article about their experiences with flirting in the field (2016) struck a chord with us. They use the adjective 'innocuous' to describe their flirting, which in the light of our experiences is enables a discussion about when flirting is harmless and when is it not? What do we do when the flirting no longer feels harmless, or when it feels harmless for one participant and not the other? We have both felt expected to flirt for the sake of our research, and any concerns we have raised regarding this with supervisors or colleagues have been dismissed or trivialised. Discussed informally it is assumed to be something we just do as part of interactions with participants. Given the context of our fields, the aggressive masculinities, unequal power relations and racist hierarchies, flirting was rarely innocuous in our experience. It evidenced the power white men exercise in the game farming landscape, over women, and over black people and over nature (including its increased commodification). We felt that if we rejected the flirting, we risked compromising the access and relationships considered necessary for our research process. It seems as if harmless flirting can be an

acceptable enactment of sex and sexualities in the field, but to accept this without consideration of personal boundaries, can lead to ethical and personal dilemmas or even potentially harmful situations.

We conclude by stating that critical reflections and being honest, about the ways in which we negotiate research relations, and in particular the role of sexuality, is political. We have shared our stories and received mainly encouragement from women who relate to the experience of silencing themselves to "ease out personal discomfort and erase professional anxieties (Markowitz, 2006: 45)". We have been warned about being honest about playing into desires, or feeling unprepared and intimidated in the field, as this might discredit us as researchers. And so writing, revising, and submitting this article has very much been a political act. It indeed upsets hierarchies in the field as well as in the academy, notably the position of the white heterosexual male academic who, as a category, rarely contribute to reflections on the role of the researchers' sexuality and gender in the process of generating knowledge (as noted by Elliston 2005; Kulick and Wilson 1995). By situating ourselves in the knowledge-generating process we can question the notions of objectivity and detachment associated with academic credibility, and the idea that emotions and feelings are not legitimate sources of knowledge. Further, through sharing our stories we have shown that reflecting on the role of sex, sexuality, and emotions in ethnographic research relations is a relevant effort to address power in ethnographic knowledge-making, as well as a way to engage in the emotional and physical well-being of ethnographers.

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