

A woman's doctoral body: Fieldwork and sexualized violence

Maria Art

In this paper, I analyse my (re)positioning as a doctoral student and woman, after I was violated during the first term of my ethnographic research in a Southeast Asian metropolis. I ground my analysis in research that has been published in recent years on topics such as sexualized violence and vulnerabilities within academia. This body of literature is still not sufficiently acknowledged within mainstream anthropology. Additionally, I provide a first-hand account of the emotional processes I went through in the first few weeks after having been sexually violated in the field to offer support to whoever might need it.

The sexualized harassment and assault of researchers during fieldwork is a topic that is not as acknowledged in mainstream anthropology as it should be. There is a rich corpus of literature addressing and analysing structural inequalities and violence towards people who do not identify with the archetypal researcher, but it remains too much at the margins of our discipline (Smith 2005; Pollard 2009; Ahmed 2017; Hanson & Richards 2019; Schneider 2020). This realisation struck me hard in the aftermath of my first long-term field research during which I experienced sexualized violence.¹ This experience completely changed my personal life and my position towards and within my field of research – it influenced how my interlocutors perceived me and how information and knowledge were shared with me afterwards.

This act of violence was possible due to inequalities that are inseparable from dynamics of gender. I echo Moreno (1995) when I

say that rape is *the* tool to punish a woman unwilling to act according to patriarchal norms. In my case, this concerned not agreeing to a one-night stand in order to serve the sexual desire of the perpetrator - the rape was about dominance and subordination. The fact that this stranger and I were crossing paths that night was a coincidence, leaving me paralysed and puzzled afterwards. In need of a coping strategy, I began to read about research and sexualized violence in the field. I started to write the first lines of this paper in the first few days after the assault. Trying to intellectualise what happened helped me to address the isolation and loneliness of that experience in addition to fighting a feeling of guilt and shame, something I initially associated with having 'failed' as a researcher. The feeling of being a 'failure' is a topic I found discussed in several essays, articles, and chapters I read during that time by, for example Eva Moreno (1995), Sinah Kloß (2017) and Rebecca Hanson and Patricia Richards (2017; 2019). The paradigm of the standardised researcher in mainstream anthropology, as it is taught in method training at universities, does not acknowledge that researchers can have several characteristics and gendered identities, which makes them more vulnerable in their research contexts. Bodies assigned female at birth for example, but also as members of the BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ community, are faced with various gendered dynamics. Due to these different characteristics, researchers have different experiences, which should also be reflected in the methodological training.

Yet, my primary emotion after the assault was rage, not guilt or shame. Rage is an emotion my interlocutors could relate to. They are themselves affected by structural violence and often rage after negative experiences based on classism, racism, sexism, and misogyny. My field is located in a country of the Global South, and the group of people I was following are involved in various kinds of poverty-related activism. They are themselves marginalised and, therefore, more vulnerable. The members of the group are mainly non-white and identify as male. In opposition to this, I - a female-identifying anthropologist - am a white, cis-gendered woman from the Global

North with an academic background who has enough funding to travel and stay there for months to do research. This imbalance affected our relationship, as my wealth and academic background were not comprehensible to them. In their country, access to educational institutions is restricted. These activists belong to a part of the population, whose access to education is structurally limited through classism. As a result, their access to wage labour, which can secure their existential needs like food, clothing, and housing, is also limited. Due to their families' financial hardships, some members of that group could not even graduate from high school and experienced homelessness.

At first, we could comprehend these structural inequalities that determine our respective lives in a nuanced way. The most evident contrast of privilege was based on structural racism and classism: as a white person, I could travel from the Global North to the Global South. The other way around comprises of an opposite dynamic: for them, access to 'my' region is strict and difficult to obtain. Yet, besides these global inequalities, I face other limitations as a cis-gendered woman in a patriarchal world. In the beginning of my research, this gendered inequality was still concealed by my own privileges. Although the group of activists is part of the ethnic majority in their country's context and do not face state-produced structural racism, they are more vulnerable to state-produced structural classism.

In contrast, I am not vulnerable to this kind of discrimination because I am not part of these marginalised groups. That is what initially provided me with easy access to their country. Nevertheless, by analysing this structural privilege and discrimination, it is easy to forget that we all are vulnerable to 'simple' and more direct acts of violence. In our everyday life and 'even' during research, these acts of violence can target our 'only' unprivileged characteristics, and our privileged characteristics cannot protect us in these instances.

I was reminded of that vulnerability when I – the woman anthropologist –² was raped. Because this act of sexualized violence

was made possible by deeply rooted structural sexism and misogyny, neither my wealthy background nor my white body could protect me. Suddenly, the activists and I had something in common: I realized we are both vulnerable to structural inequality and violence, albeit in a different manner. While I received no support from any official institution, and my country's embassy even dismissed my claim when I reached out for support, my interlocutors were able to relate to me feeling vulnerable, helpless and hurt. Although we do not belong to the same vulnerable group, my experiences became comprehensible. They also recognised my rage as a familiar response to violence. This understanding allowed more empathic solidarity to emerge between us, which enabled us to reflect and connect to each other's realities.

In the framework of this paper, I show that this event was a turning point, not only in my personal but also professional life. I am not either a woman *or* an anthropologist; I am a woman anthropologist, and I have a gendered 'doctoral' body. My intention in this article is, first and foremost, to acknowledge other researchers who share similar experiences and tell them that they are not alone. Writing about the assault became an essential tool for me to reclaim and maintain my autonomy. It helped me fight the shadows that keep recurring and give this experience a proper place, as I am not willing to accept that this rape will become the core of my doctoral research. While this makes my writing vulnerable, as it reminds me of what I have been through, it also allows me to limit it to a particular area rather than interfering with my life as a whole.

Furthermore, although there is a rich body of literature about researchers and their vulnerabilities, what I found that up till today, it has remained in the margins and is rarely taught in seminars at universities. One part of this niche literature analyses the power dynamics that lead to the women researchers being sexually harassed and/or assaulted within their home institutions or during research and the fear of how it will affect their reputation and career as an anthropologist (Moreno 1995; Kloß 2017; Hanson & Richards 2019).

This body of literature also discusses how structural inequalities are reproduced within academia and are not adequately recognized and deconstructed. Mainstream literature does not adequately reflect that an archetypical researcher is a highly privileged person in terms of gender, class, and race. Furthermore, the experiences of researchers who do not fulfil one or more of these privileged characteristics and face barriers are still mostly dismissed. With this paper, I want to contribute to an emergent body of literature that analyses how the violation of my body, which is gendered 'female', and my 'doctoral' body influenced my position as a researcher within my field of study. I also aim to contribute to anthropological methodology regarding the variety of experiences researchers can have during fieldwork and how these feed into the process of knowledge production. This article also serves as a contribution aiming at bringing this discourse widely into the curricula of our institutions. Just as Berry et al. argue in their article:

We refuse the emblematic racially privileged male anthropologist and the aforementioned assumptive logics of *doing* ethnographic fieldwork, both of which undergird the discipline's implicit masculinist 'shut up and take it' mentality in reference to gendered violence in the field (Berry et al. 2017, 538).

Women researchers are a vulnerable group in masculinist academic culture. Suppose these women researchers are also part of the BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA+ community, they are even more at risk, as structural inequality and violence are intersectional and consequently even less reflected in androcentric discourse.

WHEN FIELDWORK GIVES YOU LEMONS...

Two uncontrollable but probably inevitable aspects of ethnographic research are coincidences and collapses. Both reposition the researcher within the field of research and influence interdependencies and interactions:

Not only do they [coincidences and collapses] reveal responses that we might not otherwise discover, but they also convert our perspective and that of our informants from one of unthinking engagement, being lost in the flow of habitual activity, to a reflective, objectifying stance toward whatever has broken down and its immediate surround (Crapanzano 2010, 60).

An ethnographer must become extroverted while doing ethnographic research. Otherwise, their life as a researcher will most likely be lonesome. We as ethnographers must be social to learn about the social life worlds of others. It is also essential to build and maintain a support network in cases of coincidence and/or collapse. As an independent researcher, who only had an administrative link to one official institution in the country where I conducted my ethnographic research, I needed to make friends quickly in order to succeed:

Fieldwork is a challenging experience. [...] We often go as independent, individual researchers without affiliation in the field, which makes our position more difficult in comparison with other 'temporary migrants' (for that is what we are, effectively). [...] Without our usual support networks, we must make our own way. More than this, we must integrate with our surroundings, actively pursue contacts in the field, and above all interact with local inhabitants (Congdon 2015, 15).

The assumption of coincidence and collapse as inevitable aspects of ethnographic research in relation to being a 'temporary migrant' describes my research experience quite well. The research I initially planned was turned upside down in the middle of fieldwork, and it was a coincidence because the rapist was not somebody I knew. However, coincidences and collapses do not just influence our position in the field as researchers, they also affect our bodies. Since ethnographic fieldwork is embodied fieldwork, we seem to separate two dimensions of our identity and body, in my case, a body which was assigned female at birth, which is at the same time a 'doctoral body'. During

my first period of long-term ethnographic research, I experienced a collapse triggered by coincidence, which targeted the vulnerability of my 'female' body and, through this, also hurt what I call my 'doctoral' body.

This distinction between a woman's body and a 'doctoral' body came to my mind during personal discussions with peers who shared their experiences with me.³ One topic we discussed was how we, as women researchers, enter the field with strategies of 'neutralisation' to be perceived as researchers only. According to the archetypical researcher in the mainstream discourse, these neutral researchers are male-bodied persons who can be, without any limitations, just researchers. Nevertheless, people who identify as women already need strategies of becoming 'just' researchers, not women researchers. We need strategies of turning our gendered bodies into, in my case, a 'doctoral' body. Even my supervisor, for example, shared with me how she pretended to be married and carried out research with predominantly older people to feel safe during her doctoral research. My strategy consisted of presenting myself solely as a researcher – I invented my so-called 'doctoral' body. With this attempt at 'neutralisation', I intended to act in a 'professional' and thus genderless way. I intended to match my role as a variant of the so-called archetypical researcher that left little to no room for my 'female' body. Although my supervisor and I did not try to neutralise our bodies in itself, we attempted to neutralise our femininity through the embodied performance of sexual unavailability. Such embodied performances also helped me and my female-identifying peers to build up an illusion of safety from possible experiences of violence by reassuring ourselves that acting 'professionally' is less risky. We thought we could avoid being sexualized and objectified and thus minimise the risk of violent assault through 'professional' behaviour – a sign of how much we internalized structural sexism and misogyny. Our strategies are not only for our protection but also a reproduction of the victim-blaming narrative, because: "If we do not have strategies to protect ourselves, is it also our fault when we get assaulted?" Moreover, although it did not

work in my and some of my peers' cases, this neutralisation stands in opposition to the message conveyed to researchers about how to conduct proper ethnographic research. It is a field of tension that ethnographers must navigate between two extremes: If you get too close, you might be at risk of violation, and if you are too distanced, you might not get *good data*.

VULNERABLE BODIES, DISMISSED VOICES AND EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

My personal and my professional self – my 'female' body and my 'doctoral' body – were violated, and as a result, my writing became vulnerable: "To write vulnerably is to open a Pandora's box. Who can say what will come flying out?" (Behar 1996, 19). This quote of Ruth Behar puts into two short sentences what I experienced in the last years while I was working on this paper and what I initially could not pin down and understand. To cope with my body's violation and not let this violation affect my 'doctoral' body too much, I started writing this piece, and it indeed was like opening a Pandora's box. In the beginning, I thought that I could just write down my experience to intellectualise it, and I thought that was enough for me to move on with my research and writing: the rape had overshadowed my work and paralysed both my 'female' body and my 'doctoral' body:

For female anthropologists, one of the consequences of the fictitiously 'gender-free' life we lead at university is that, if we bring up issues that are specific to us as women in the academic context, we run the risk of doing damage to our identities as anthropologists. This is, of course, because the archetypal anthropologist is a man. Part of the hidden agenda for female anthropologists is, therefore, to avoid drawing attention to ourselves as women when we establish our professional identities. After all, who wants to be a *female* anthropologist when it seems possible to be a 'real' anthropologist? As far as the danger of sexual violence is concerned, it may be part

of a woman's daily life, but it is not seen to be relevant to the professional part of ourselves: the 'anthropologist' part. 'Anthropologists' do not get harassed or raped. Women do. (Moreno 1995, 246).

The archetypal researcher – the white, heterosexual, elite, cisgender, able-bodied man – embodies all kinds of privilege. This approach does not just influence access to fields of study and information for knowledge production, it also influences risks and dangers that can evolve for the researchers themselves and the reflection thereon. These risks and dangers are often seen as external factors in knowledge production. Because the violence the archetypal researcher may experience is not structural, it is seen as just part of doing research. Therefore, it is reproducing the “masculinist ‘shut up and take it’ mentality” (Berry et al. 2017, 538), which Berry et al. identified as underlying ethnographic research – both in methodological training and conduct.

To pinpoint the specific focus of this paper: sexualized relations are not as stigmatised for most (male-identifying) researchers because it “alludes to the idea [...] that cultivating a sexual relationship at your field site is one of the best ways to become embedded and gather good data” (Hanson & Richards 2019, 83). Whereas, when (women) researchers experience sexualized violence, it is their failure, and the *data* gathered is not *good*. This approach shows a double standard that defines sexualized violence as part of sexuality and thus justifies privilege blindness and structural power imbalances that make this kind of violence possible while silencing those affected.

Furthermore, the methodological training at universities, which is provided for researchers-to-be, includes theoretical knowledge and tools of being a *good researcher* – including research ethics and rules regarding adequate knowledge production. This education points towards the safety of the research participants, but not towards the safety of researchers themselves. No matter how

privileged a researcher is, the experience of violence is traumatising. Moreover, although not all violent experiences can be prevented, raising awareness on structural violence, power imbalances, and the possibility of violent experiences, in general, can support the healing process afterwards, if they become accepted as part of the research. Methodological training at universities also mostly dismisses that ethnographic research is embodied research (Hanson & Richards 2019).

BREAKING THE SILENCE

During my literature review after the assault, three studies had a particular healing effect on me. These publications shed light on the structures that make sexualized violence possible in the first place and discuss the taboo around it in our institutions. The topic they all have in common was the structural silencing and the breaking of that silence. I have reread these three pieces multiple times. Probably the most well-known personal account is that of Eva Moreno, who shared her experience of being raped by her research assistant in the chapter *Rape in the field – reflections from a survivor* in an edited volume in 1995. Moreno reflects on her doctoral research, which took place 20 years ago, and how she, over a long period, ignored threats to her safety by her research assistant. She organised her research to “[do] things according to the book” (Moreno 1995, 225), instead of giving the needed attention to the safety threats. Moreno analyses the underlying power structures that led to her being raped by concluding that “rape in any form is about power and male domination” (Moreno 1995, 236). In her reflections on how the rape occurred, she did not give much thought to the relational dynamics until the rape took place. She was more concerned with not being able to gather enough *good data* and not being what is considered a *good anthropologist*. This concern can be read in nearly every account offered by authors who experienced sexualized harassment and/or assault. Back at her home institution, her peers and supervisors did not support her, but instead blamed her for the rape. The publisher of the edited volume thought the author had not sufficiently anonymised the case and was

concerned that her former assistant might engage in legal proceedings for slander. They convinced the author to use a pseudonym: 'Eva Moreno'. Twenty years later, the publishing house is still silencing her by not allowing her to publish under her real name. The reactions to Eva Moreno therefore demonstrate an environment in which victims of sexualized violence are stigmatised and perpetrators are protected. These institutions and their reactions reproduce and manifest rape culture within academia.

Although Moreno's rape happened around 1975 and her chapter was published in 1995, it is still a disturbingly relatable and contemporary topic. The experiences she described could also be the ones of my peers nowadays, since they are similar to what some of them confided in me. It is also similar to what Sinah Kloß shares in 2017, over twenty years after Moreno's publication, in her paper *Sexual(ized) Harassment and Ethnographic Fieldwork: A Silenced Aspect of Social Research*. The work of Kloß has accompanied me for years now, because her paper is probably the first widely acknowledged research paper about sexualized harassment in the field. Kloß shares her own experience of sexualized harassment during fieldwork and analyses the power dynamics and structures that led to her being harassed by her host father. The foundations are sexism and misogyny, not sexuality itself. As Kloß argues, the term *sexual violence* seems to relate this kind of violence to sexuality, which is not accurate. I am echoing Kloß hereby that,

It is a social control mechanism, reasserting and recreating masculine dominance. Although both men and women often (mis)understand sexual(ized) harassment [and assault] as primarily based on sexual attraction, it is largely an expression, exertion, and recreation of (male) power to control the recipient's behavior (Kloß 2017, 399).

In agreement with Kloß I do not refer to *sexual violence*, but to *sexualized violence* "to emphasise that the core of this behaviour lies

not in a sexual attraction but modes of reinforcing (patriarchal) power” (Kloß 2017, 400).

Although Rebecca Hanson and Patricia Richards do not use such a detailed defined term of sexualized violence in their research, their argumentation supports Moreno and Kloß. They identify ethnographic research, the decisions, processes, and outcomes as dominated by androcentric norms (see Hanson & Richards 2017, 601). For their study, they interviewed 56 women in academia who were carrying out ethnographic research:

Participants often described sexual harassment and other sexualized interactions as just part of life as an ethnographer – it was something that was present, and bothersome, but not necessarily examined reflexively. Because these interactions do not seem directly relevant to research topics, they can be perceived as unimportant (Hanson & Richards 2017, 602).

Furthermore, by excluding their experiences of harassment and assault, for example, for fear of being judged *bad ethnographers*, the researchers exclude information that may help their audience understand their work better.

In these three accounts, the experienced violence is sometimes described in a very detailed manner. Although of course selective, it reads as if there are no silences in the authors’ writing, the quotes and descriptions of the study participants. While I am expressing that I got raped in the next section and am analysing very personal details, I decided I do not want to give a detailed account of how the rape happened. I do not feel silenced by somebody else, but I am silencing myself. Out of personal pain but also because I do not want to deal with negative backlashes. I am protecting myself because I do not want to do the emotional labour necessary for the reactions this paper could produce in both my personal and professional life. Again, this protection strategy could be a sign of the deep-rooted structural

sexism and misogyny I internalized. Moreover, I am just tired from the (emotional) labour I have already done for me and others. Therefore, I anonymised myself and every detail that could be identified. This way my peers also remain anonymous, and nobody is forced to do more (emotional) labour on this topic as intended.

Another reason I have decided to anonymise myself is because I don't want to be labelled as a raped researcher. I am a researcher who was raped during a field research stay. That is a fact. Nevertheless, it also happened in the past, and although I accept it as part of my biography and my doctoral research, I want to be able to put that behind me when I finish my PhD. I want to be a postdoc and not remain a raped researcher. If I want to continue researching sexualized violence in my postdoc, I want to make that decision out of research interest, not because I am already stigmatized. Furthermore, with this work in my publication list, I am unsure if I am still in charge of how I am perceived when I apply for jobs and funding as a woman anthropologist, PhD.

COINCIDENCE AND COLLAPSE

[Initially, there was an ethnographic vignette about the assault here,
but I cannot stand reading it anymore

So, I deleted it

The vignette ends the following day with my interlocutor/friend
waiting for me in the kitchen and asking me: How are you?]

AFTERMATH

Why did I use the words coincidence and collapse for the header to the section where I originally had an ethnographic vignette of how I got raped? Because it was a coincidence that was not foreseeable from a distance, like the experiences described in the works of Moreno and Kloß, whose perpetrators were part of their social environment. In my case my friend/interlocutor was living in the apartment where I was violated, and he was the one who intervened and stopped the perpetrator from continuing the rape. But the rapist was not part of our social environment. Afterwards, my friend gave me a spare bedroom for the night and awaited me the next morning to check in on me. I still cannot describe in what condition I was when he was waiting for me in the kitchen, asking how I was. But I can now find words to understand the changes that have occurred within me since then, and what I was not able to grasp at that moment: not only was I sexually assaulted as a woman, but also my 'doctoral' body. Both my bodies were torn apart like a piece of clothing and were not able to protect anything anymore. The integrity in between these two bodies was taken away from me and violently shattered, since the apartment, where my friend was living, was also my main research site. I was not only assaulted in my friend's apartment, but also in my main site of data collection. Essentially, this means that it was not only my 'female' body that was assaulted, but my 'doctoral' body as well, which not only made me collapse on a personal as well as professional level. Until this point, I had not given close thought to how tightly bonded my research was to my personal condition. What I came to understand very quickly afterwards was that one cannot exist without the other, and that my identity as an anthropologist is not something that cannot be separated from my gendered body – as a woman and doctoral researcher I only have one body.

The lone female researcher or How I got raped is how I started my journal entry the day after the assault. As preparation for research, I read Venetia Congdon's piece from 2015, *The 'Lone Female Researcher': Isolation and Safety Upon Arrival in the field*, a few months before

I went on fieldwork. The term *lone female researcher* sometimes wandered around in my mind but always remained in the background. On this day, this term moved from to back of my mind to the front. The *lone female researcher* as an image symbolises a woman researcher who enters her research site without her usual support networks and faces gender-related difficulties (see Congdon 2015, 16). In my notes, I tried to reconstruct what had happened. My notes and diary entries form a protocol of every detail that I thought to be important. They are all written in English, which is not my mother tongue but the language I use during my research. I barely have notes or diary entries in my native language. This seems to be a familiar strategy. I also encountered a similar strategy in other women's work, such as Mingwei Huang, who writes about being raped during fieldwork as well:

Fieldwork and rape. Because the rape occurred [sic] during fieldwork, I compartmentalised the trauma as something that happened to 'researcher me' in a faraway place. Seeing the rape as a fieldwork event helped me to intellectualise it and thus distance myself from it, but the hyper-analysis also undid me. In the habit of constantly analysing my self-presentation and interactions with others, I replayed every move I made that night (Huang 2016).

I can identify with this statement of Mingwei Huang. From the start, I treated the assault as an event within my research. I was able to distance myself from it through different coping strategies. I mainly talked and wrote about it in English. This allowed me to take a step away from it and phrase the assault and everything connected to it in a language that is not my own. It therefore does not reach the same emotional depths my native language does. English is also my work language. As I treated it as a research event, I questioned my professionalism and was scared whether I would lose my PhD project if I could not manage to 'get myself together again'. I feared losing something that I identified as a part of what constitutes myself. I ended this journal entry with the sentence: "I am raging. I am helpless.

I am paralysed.” From one moment to the other, my life was taken away from me, and rage was rumbling inside of me. I experienced this rage not only as emotional, but also as physical pain.

It quickly became apparent that I could not manage to go back to the research as I did before. This made me feel helpless: the reason why I received funding was precisely this research. Next to all the other negative emotions I already had to cope with, I felt the fear of potential failure surfacing. I felt like being a waste of research funds, which made me feel paralysed. In their study on sexualized harassment and assault within academia, Hanson and Richards (2019) also describe those researchers who were harassed and/or assaulted felt paralysed afterwards out of fear of how it will affect their work, career and relations with supervisors and colleagues. In their study, it also becomes clear that many participants had to deal with adverse reactions from their institution. In my case, I was lucky enough to have a woman supervisor, who was not dismissive or engaging in blame when I reached out to her two days after the assault. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the typical response and already traumatised people become re-traumatised by supervisors and peers, the ones they expected would support them. This is another power imbalance which creates vulnerabilities.

REPOSITIONING MYSELF

How did I get here? This is a question I also ask myself now while writing this paper. I know how I got my PhD project and how I got assaulted. However, how do these two things correlate? How did I get here writing this paper instead of a chapter for my thesis?

I got here because my ‘doctoral’ body cannot be seen apart from my ‘female’ body, and my PhD project cannot be separated from the sexualized assault. It influenced my whole project, not only the time I was able to spend in my main research site. It influenced my position in my field and the connection I had with my interlocutors.

The study of Hanson and Richards (2019) shows that women researchers' experiences of sexualized harassment and assault in the field are not taken as part of knowledge production and, in this sense, not seen as essential and relevant in ethnographic research. Through silencing these ethnographers, they are not only left alone with their suffering, but their data is also conceived as contaminated, and therefore the knowledge production would not be accurately. As they sum up:

A recent interest in embodiment as a methodological approach has placed heavy emphasis on the researcher's body as a tool to insert themselves into the worlds of others. However, this perspective, concerned primarily with researchers' bodies as instruments of discovery, does not differentiate between the hardships researchers will encounter precisely because of these bodies. Indeed, these approaches take embodiment into account only to the degree that 'the body' allows the researcher to turn themselves into the phenomenon; they do not consider the ways in which different bodies are vulnerable to different sensations, suffering, and violence in the field (Hanson & Richards 2019, 53).

Starting from my experience of sexualized violence during fieldwork, I gained significant amounts of *unusable data*. I refer to Hamilton with the term *unusable data* when she phrases that "a phoenix (my dissertation) rising from the ashes of some great conflagration (my doctoral fieldwork)" (Hamilton 2009, 73). Hamilton defines *unusable data* as data produced during ethnographic research that is not useless per se but does not fit into the analytical and/or ethnographic schema or is simply not relevant to serve the research interest (see Hamilton 2009, 74). What I saw as unusable data were reactions that sum up the repositioning of myself within my field of study. I did not perceive these reactions at first as a process of repositioning, but as me failing in being a proper researcher: I had become dependent on the emotional support of my interlocutors. My whole research organised

itself anew through my reactions to the assault and the responses I got from my interlocutors.

The repositioning that occurred did not only result from the assault in my main research site and one of my interlocutors rescuing me from this situation. It also resulted from the emotional support of two of the other interlocutors. They were among the first ones I spoke to and asked for support. Our relationship changed: although we had gotten on well with each other personally and had become friends right at the beginning of my research, it was still me studying them. Afterwards, our relationship shifted to them taking care of me and my wellbeing. They were part of my healing process and supported me with considerations for possible action. By them supporting not only my research but also my wellbeing, our relationship changed and became more intense. One of my interlocutors started to talk to me about how his feelings toward me changed after I spoke up to him about the assault and asked for his assistance. He told me that I became “a real sister” and that “this shows how good our relationship really is”. He appreciated the trust I showed towards him when I openly talked about my violation and vulnerability. It influenced our relationship positively since we had a power imbalance, which I deconstructed at the beginning of this paper.

After reading Moreno (1995), Kloß (2017) and their analysis of the power dynamics that led to the sexualized violence, I started to think about the power relation within my field before and after: the way I was perceived changed because of the rape. Our initial perceived imbalance became more balanced, our connection became more profound, and we could take a more empathetic approach in listening and understanding one another. Similarly to Moreno (1995), who had described how, when she came back to the town of her research, the people had changed their perceptions about her. She recalls that after the rape, she made numerous contacts with the townspeople through being able to identify as a woman who was raped by a man. An experience especially the townswomen were able to comprehend.

They started to perceive her as a *real person*. As the quote of my interlocutor above shows, I got perceived as a *real sister*.

(RE)INTEGRATION THROUGH VULNERABILITY

After the assault and in my remaining time in the field, my primary emotion was rage. The experience of this emotion transformed my research, since my interlocutors were able to relate to rage. By talking and writing about rage within anthropology, one cannot get around Renato Rosaldo's *Grief and the Headhunter's Rage*. Rosaldo offers a very personal account of how he finally understood the headhunting practice of the Ilongot he studied for years when in a tragic accident, his wife died while they were on fieldwork. Initially, Rosaldo studied their headhunting practice and tried to explain it through a theory of exchange. After he presented this theory to an Ilongot man, he told Rosaldo that they do not think about exchange when they go headhunting after one of their kin dies. Rosaldo explained the underlying dynamics of the practice as follows: "To him [an Ilongot man], grief, rage, and headhunting go together in a self-evident manner. Either you understand or you do not. And, in fact, for the longest time I simply did not" (Rosaldo 1989, 1-2). Up to the loss of his wife, Rosaldo did not have such an intensely personal experience of loss and grief and the resulting anger to understand the explanations the Ilongot gave him:

Not until some fourteen years after first recording the terse Ilongot statement about grief and a headhunter's rage did I begin to grasp its overwhelming force. [...] Only after being repositioned through a devastating loss of my own could I better grasp that Ilongot older men mean precisely what they say when they describe the anger in bereavement as the source of their desire to cut off human heads (Rosaldo 1989, 3).

Rosaldo had to experience the loss of a beloved person himself to understand the motivation behind the Ilongot men's practice. He was

able to identify with their rage and finally understood the explanations offered to him by the Ilongot, which had previously seemed “too simple, thin, opaque, implausible, stereotypical, or otherwise unsatisfying” (Rosaldo 1989, 3). He argued that he was repositioned through experiencing the emotions related to loss. From there, Rosaldo was able to better understand the rage of the Ilongot, and he was able to make sense of the explanations he got in his time in the field.

In my own research, the assault led to a closer bond between my interlocutors and me, since I not only showed my vulnerability, but we were also able to rage about structural violence together. This somehow tore down a barrier between us, and we were able to build up more trust in our relationship, which also became a relationship of emotional support. The fact that I had asked and accepted their offer of support had shown my interlocutors how much I trusted them. This established a different reciprocal relation between us as I had come to them in probably one of the most desperate moments. After I disclosed my vulnerability and difficulties in coping with the structural violence I had experienced, my interlocutors increasingly opened up to me. They also started to openly disclose their vulnerability and their difficulties in coping with structural violence, which is one of the motivations for their poverty-informed activism. While there was first a focus on our differences, our experiences shifted to our sameness: being vulnerable and raging about it.

...ASK FOR THE TEQUILA FIRST AND MAKE LEMONADE WITH THE REST

As I look back at my experiences, I realize our relationship changed from differences to sameness. Back in 2018 however, I was not able to realize this shift: I only felt miserable and like a failed anthropologist when I was sitting in the apartment of my interlocutor two days after I got raped. I asked him if he was free that evening because I had some issues and told him that I wanted to ask for his advice. He was prepared to talk about any problem with me, but not about rape.

When I was sitting there, crying, and telling him what happened and how helpless I was, I felt like a complete failure. Although he reassured me and comforted me that it is only human to ask for assistance after being traumatised, I felt shame and rage.

My interlocutors offered me a space for reintegration after being traumatised. When I came back in 2019, I did not feel unsafe, stressed or re-traumatised. This group of activists gave me the feeling of safety within their community and actively had an eye on me when I became tense during going out at night or walking home. Since they are themselves traumatised and at risk of being violated when they are not looking out for each other, they integrated me into this mutual support practice. My traumatisation and our resulting relationship repositioned me as a researcher within my field of study.

Starting to read and write immediately after the rape helped me somehow to stay sane and channel the emotions rumbling inside of me. Reflecting in my writing on what happened and rereading it helped me process through externalising my thoughts. These externalised thoughts were also the topic in ongoing discussions I had and still have in my growing international network of peers. In these personal discussions, there is so much potential, and it shows that there is still a lot more we need to bring to the table and discuss to be able to heal; meanwhile, we must work hard to prepare young ethnographers to raise awareness around challenges one can experience during fieldwork. Moreover, although those challenges cannot be prevented entirely, the reflections should at least become part of the curricula. In some cases, violent experiences may even be prevented through awareness-raising, recognizing red flags and learning not to worry about what is considered *good data* and being a *good anthropologist*.

All along the way, my supervisor has supported me with whatever I needed: time off, counselling on how to organise my work, reading and editing this paper, and discussing several topics in and around the woman researcher within academia with me, including how to extend

the methodological training at our university. I am grateful to have her as my supervisor, but it is also worrisome that her behaviour towards me is more the exception than the norm – I am again privileged. The discussions with my peers revealed that by being dismissed by their supervisors or their fear of being dismissed and victim-blamed, some could not work with their ethnographic material for years. This (fear of) dismissal blocks the personal healing process and is also disadvantageous to them in the job hunt after finishing the PhD, as potential employers might ask why one has taken so long to finish. There is no 'legit' explanation, and the downward spiral of shame, guilt, victim-blaming, and discrimination continues. It may be on us to raise our voices. But it is on the people in powerful positions who supervise us, to listen to us, acknowledge us, and prepare the next generation of ethnographers-to-be.

It is critical to note that my privileged relationship with my supervisor enabled me to write this paper. Previously, the data from this time felt flawed, I had not used it before as I considered it *unusable*. As I had another term of longitudinal fieldwork coming up in 2019, I only used the latter data for my thesis, otherwise, I am not sure how I would have managed to write. However, her acknowledgement of the rape and the healing process as part of my doctoral research gave me the human, temporal, and financial resources to intellectualise this experience with this writing project for nearly four years now. While the funding for my PhD project is now coming to an end, she was never pressuring me to let go of this writing project and to go on with my doctoral thesis to finish *in time*. It was her who encouraged me not to externalise but to accept the rape as part of my research and reflect on those dynamics in my thesis. I know other peers who came back from fieldwork traumatised, but they did not have the same resources as me. The traumatisation and the re-traumatisation blocked not only the writing process but also their scientific self-perception. Just as Kloß argues, “female researchers may feel inadequate as anthropologists for having encountered sexual(ized) harassment – incidents characterised as ‘unremarkable’ yet personally traumatising, which may lead

promising scholars to abandon fieldwork as a methodology” (Kloß 2017, 398). Alternatively, it may also lead to young scholars quitting promising research projects or even leaving academia.

This paper is an analysis of and by a doctoral researcher who got violated. However, this paper aims not only to draw attention to sexualized violence and demand its acknowledgement in the academic environment. The aim is to raise awareness on the diverse forms of violence that diverse researchers can experience and are not granted space and resources: I demand the acknowledgement of these experienced realities. Processing and healing from violence can take a long time and requires experimentation with different coping strategies. This paper has been years in the making and has shifted its form and content every time I opened the document and started a new round of rewriting and editing. For now, my paper has reached its final form. Nevertheless, my healing process is still to be continued, and maybe sometime in the future, I will pick up another writing project about it.

Notes

- ¹ I will use the formulation of sexualized harassment/assault/violence in this text, as I think it describes this kind of violence as a social control mechanism more appropriately. Later, I will elaborate on this definition in more detail.
- ² Throughout this article, I use woman as an adjective to be inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community. See for example (accessed 11-4-2022): <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/comma-queen/female-trouble-the-debate-over-woman-as-an-adjective>
- ³ Over time after the assault, I built up an international network of undergraduate, doctoral, and postdoctoral researchers who experienced sexualized violence during research and within their home institutions. We exchanged our experiences and discussed several topics I am discussing in this article. Not all of them are anthropologists and/or doctoral researchers, but all are researchers in social sciences.

References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Behar, Ruth. 1996. *The Vulnerable Observer. Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Berry, Maya J., Claudia Chávez Argüelles, Shanya Cordis, Sarah Ihmoud and Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada. 2017. "Toward a Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Field." *Cultural Anthropology*, 32 (4): 537-565.
- Congdon, Venetia. 2015. "The 'Lone Female Researcher': Isolation and Safety upon arrival in the Field." *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 7(1): 15-24.
- Crapanzano, Vincent. 2010. "At the Heart of the Discipline': Critical Reflections on Fieldwork." In: *Emotions in the Field. The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience*, edited by James Davies and Dimitrina Spencer: 55-78. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Hamilton, Jennifer A. 2009. "On the Ethics of Unusable Data." In: *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used To Be. Learning Anthropology's Method in a Time of Transition*, edited by James D. Faubion and George E. Marcus. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Hanson, Rebecca and Patricia Richards. 2017. "Sexual Harassment and Construction of Ethnographic Knowledge." *Sociological Forum*, 32(3): 587-609.
- Hanson, Rebecca and Patricia Richards. 2019. *Harassed. Gender, Bodies, and Ethnographic Research*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Huang, Mingwei. 2016. Vulnerable Observers: Notes on Fieldwork and Rape. Accessed November 11, 2018. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Vulnerable-Observers-Notes-on/238042>.
- Kloß, Sinah Theres. 2017. "Sexual(ized) Harassment and Ethnographic Fieldwork: A Silenced Aspect of Social Research." *Ethnography*, 18 (3): 396-414
- Moreno, Eva. 1995. "Rape in the Field: Reflections from a Survivor." In: *Taboo. Sex, Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork*, edited by Kulick, Don and Margaret Willson. New York: Routledge.
- Pollard, Amy. 2009. "Field of screams: difficulty and ethnographic fieldwork." *Anthropology Matters*, 11(2).

Rosaldo, Renato. 1989. *Culture & Truth. The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Schneider, Luisa T. 2020. "Sexual Violence during Research: How the Unpredictability of Fieldwork and the Right to Risk collide with Academic Bureaucracy and Expectations." *Critique of Anthropology*, 40(2): 173-193.

Smith, Dorothy E. 2005. *Institutional Ethnography. A Sociology for People*. Lanham: Altamira Press.