Vulnerabilities and the dilemmas of writing: Gender-based violence in the field

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This article is centered on a main theme: the vulnerabilities of the researcher in the field that we face when conducting our research and writing our texts and the possible methodological, ethical, and writing issues it causes. I seek to give meaning to a situation marked by tensions, dilemmas, and vulnerabilities that I encountered while doing fieldwork for research I conducted in favelas in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). I start from the idea that writing can also be vulnerable, and from the understanding, inspired by Butler (2015), that vulnerability and resistance are not antagonistic poles. To this end, I provide a reflection on an attempt at sexual abuse I suffered in the field. This experience changed the entire course of my fieldwork research and represented a watershed both on a personal level and in terms of my theoretical reflections. This situation was also a trigger to rethink ways of writing and expressing violence and emotions, looking for words and language to express what seems impossible to say. Building on a narration of the violence, I seek to reflect on unforeseen risks when conducting fieldwork, on the gendered character of our professional experiences, on the impacts that situations like this have on our career, as well as on the subjective constitutive character that situations like the one I experienced come to have.

> The secret harmony of disharmony: I don't want what is already made but what is tortuously in the making.
> My unbalanced words are the luxury of my silence.
> I write in acrobatic, aerial pirouettes – I write because I passionately want to speak. Even though writing is only giving me the great measure of silence.
>
> Clarice Lispector. *The stream of life*, 1989.

I begin this article inspired by the above epigraph, authored by Clarice Lispector, one of the best-known Brazilian literary authors. In this excerpt, she addresses a theme that is central to the argument I intend to develop: the dilemmas of writing and of finding words that fill many silences (or that, ultimately, reveal the greatness and inevitability of some silences). The choice of this specific excerpt is due not only to my fascination with the author's work, but also because she inspires me to think about strategies and ways to represent in words experiences of pain, suffering, violence, and risk, finding the "harmony of disharmony", especially when we talk about ourselves.

Thus, my goal in this article is to continue a discussion I started a few years ago in 2018, about the challenges, risks, and fears that present themselves in the course of ethnographic practice. I begin my reflection from an experience of sexual harassment (or perhaps I could say an attempt at sexual violence) suffered in the field, at a time when I was conducting research on the occurrence and forms of naming sexual violence[1] against adolescents in a set of favelas in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), which I have given the fictitious[2] name of Complexo. In the following pages, I recount this experience and reflect upon the consequences of making such a case public. I propose to build on this previous article[3] – "Vulnerabilities, dilemmas and pain: fragments of a researcher in the middle of violence" - or, inspired by Veena Das (2020), to provide an "incarnation" of "earlier accounts", reread from the "passage of time". As I describe an event

that involves vulnerabilities, pain, and scars, I chose – with permission from the journal – to build on some of the passages initially published in the 2018 article instead of rewriting everything. In doing so, I try to advance some reflections that I started many years ago and I am especially interested in the impacts that the passing of time has had on my feelings and writing.

The idea of "passage of time" is central here because it is directly linked to the process of healing. Re-reading my first article, written in the heat of the moment and published a short time after the event, I can now perceive the silences in the text and the difficulty of putting into words what I experienced and felt, through the pauses. Upon reflection, I argue here that silence is inevitable. One of our main challenges is to come to terms with the idea that there is always something that we cannot communicate or that is unknowable (about the others and ourselves).

It is also clear in this previous text that I was influenced by a range of theoretical references, such as Judith Butler. These were my first guides in reflecting on violence and vulnerability, not only in this specific case, but equally in trying to understand everyday forms of violence in Rio de Janeiro favelas. In this exercise of rewriting, I once again became aware of my vulnerability when considering the relationships established in the field, the social markers of difference that position me socially, and my writing. However, this time I made advances in terms of the theoretical framework employed, bringing to the discussion anthropological references that deal with vulnerability in the field and in writing, especially from a feminist, queer, and postcolonial perspective (Berry et al 2017; Page 2017; Schneider, 2020). I think the greatest strides in this article is to advance on reflections about vulnerability, trying to develop a "vulnerable writing", as suggested by Page (2017). It is definitely not easy to admit to yourself and to the world that you, as a professional, are vulnerable in certain situations. Even though I know that I was not guilty of anything, I blamed myself many times over these years. I

remember posing myself questions: “Did I do something wrong? Was walking alone in these favelas an act of imprudence? Should I...” But I know the assault was not my fault and an important part of convincing myself of this, is to write about it again, sharing not only theoretical elucubrations, but an important and usually unspeakable part of academic work: the risks of doing fieldwork and the vulnerabilities of the researcher.

I agree with Butler (2015) in her proposition that vulnerability is not a “primary, ontological and constitutive” existential condition, because this would mean accepting that there is something pre-social about this condition. Furthermore, being characterized as vulnerable does not exclude the possibilities of political agency. This means rethinking vulnerability and no longer understanding this term as merely victimization and passivity, as the place of inaction. Vulnerability can only be understood in relation, as something socially produced and managed. It would be necessary to inquire about the mechanisms that lead to this greater possibility of being vulnerable experienced by certain individuals at specific times. With this in mind, in this essay I mobilize vulnerability as a concept that allows for me to reflect upon the harassment and its consequences at personal and professional levels. As suggested by Schneider (2020), “unpredictability” is something present in all ethnographic fieldwork research and, according to this logic, we should address it in our texts. Sexual violence in the field is one of the many unpredictable facts that can happen to a researcher. When it happens, it completely changes the course of the research. Faced with such experiences, we can become silent, or we can forge ways for making it public (questioning practices in the field and assumptions about ethnographic methods?).

In the case narrated by Schneider (2020, 5-11), in which she was raped in the field, she shows how the idea of unpredictability collides with the “bureaucratic structures of the university” that allocates the “culpability onto researchers, who are now responsible for foreseeing and avoiding liabilities”. I agree with her and appropriate many of her

reflections. My decision to write about my experience was motivated by the need to find possible healing – even if partial or incomplete – and by a feeling that we do not discuss sexual violence in the field as much as we should in Brazilian anthropology and within our universities. I cannot remember a moment in my academic trajectory – during an ethics class for example – in which we discussed violence, conflict, harm, or risks in the field. As anthropologists, we quickly understand that ethnographic work cannot be taught by a manual or guide. It is in fact unpredictable, and imponderable (as Malinowski, a canon of the discipline, wrote at the beginning of the 20th century). When the instance of harassment happened to me, I was disturbed by the lack of reflection about this topic in our universities. In a sense, lack of discussion is a way to individualize the responsibility: we simply do not talk about it. So, as Schneider (2020) posits, I am searching for a way to not silence the unpredictable and the vulnerability of the researcher, who is usually faced with a macro context that centers the responsibility for safety only on the researcher.

Some questions I raised in my previous article – and for which I found partial answers – are still valid and will drive my argument: what to do when all the techniques, learned over years, and years of lectures and theoretical readings, are insufficient to deal with the situations experienced in the field? How to deal with the researcher's own vulnerability? How to write and what textual strategies to use to account for almost unspeakable acts, memories, and events that arouse pain, fear, and fragility? What are the limits between what is appropriate or not in the academic text, especially when it comes to emotions and subjective conceptions? How to "haunt" (Cho 2008) violence, make it intelligible in contexts in which these same types of violence always seem to be lurking, are situated in the "ordinary" (Das 2007) level of life, and affect the researcher herself? If I, as a woman and a feminist, always believed in the need to speak, to tell, to narrate experiences of violence and pain, how could I act otherwise when faced with the experience of harassment?

Specifically, in this article, I reflect on the possibilities for narrating, describing, and representing violence suffered during fieldwork, in search – and this is a continuous process – of a language to represent violence. Likewise, I also reflect on the forms of writing, the academic policies that make these facts invisible, and the professional consequences such narrations could entail. As such, this article adds to a growing body of reflections on violence, harassment, and risks during fieldwork research (Hanson and Richards 2019; Kovats-Bernat 2002; Markowitz 2019; Miller 2015; Zonjić 2021). I emphasize that the article should be read as a partial and unfinished exercise of sharing experiences and I want to draw attention to the challenges that arise from the decision to make the experience of sexual harassment during fieldwork public. I seek to launch ideas, which raise new questions and problematizations, and which can help in discussions about writing and ethnographic techniques, proposing that writing itself is vulnerable to some extent.

THE HARASSMENT

My relationship with the Complexo began in 2013 when I was hired to work for a non-governmental organization. Until then, I had never heard of that group of favelas. In general, favelas are peripheral and impoverished regions of the city, marked by material precariousness and structural and durable social inequalities (Tilly 1998). In addition, they are "militarized territories" (Farias 2020) and clashes between the police (and sometimes the National Force and the Army), factions linked to drug trafficking and cargo theft, and the militias are quite common. I do not intend, in any way, to suggest that we should maintain the image of urban warfare, of "confrontation" (Vianna 2015), which populates the news and is the basis for processes of criminalization and marginalization of favelas by pitting the "bad guys" (the favela inhabitants) and the "good guys" (the police) against each other. Rather, in my research, following the important field of studies about peripheries and favelas in Brazil, I seek to present a more nuanced view of the forms of violence in these urban settings.

Later, in 2016, my relationship with the Complexo changed, as I began to conduct research in this territory for my postdoctoral research. I took on two different roles in this setting: the role of a researcher and of a social worker, as I never stopped helping the residents with their demands (such as help with donation campaigns and state bureaucracy, especially when these bureaucratic processes involved digital matters). In terms of my research, I was interested in understanding the occurrence of sexual violence against adolescents and its apparent invisibility in relation to other public forms of violence (violence from police and factions, for example). The official vocabulary (employed by the police, within legal circles, and by the network of social assistance) was marked by watertight and closed categories and did not account for the realities I found in these contexts. In addition, it seemed clear that there was another way of narrating and giving meaning to violence within the communities. Furthermore, many acts that I would – without a shadow of a doubt – classify as violent were endowed with other statuses, especially those more intimate and linked to subjectivities, and were understood as commonplace and almost as a destiny from which one could not escape. Thus, it was the central point of the research to understand the language of violence, its "ordinary" and everyday condition, its almost banal nature in these contexts.

During the three years that I worked with non-governmental organizations in the Complexo, I managed to establish a robust network of relationships with several residents and some community leaders. The establishment of these interactions was triggered by my work in the non-profit sector, which also allowed me to meet many people and establish bonds of trust and possibilities for dialogue (in addition, of course, to the practical side of seeking benefits and problem solving for residents). It was this network that guaranteed the possibility to circulate in the territory and that opened paths to access persons of interest for the research.

Right at the beginning of my field research, there was a Christmas party where volunteers organized gift giving to children from one of the communities. I took advantage of that moment, in which I was also a volunteer, to keep my network of relationship alive and continue nurturing existing contacts, which were somewhat compromised due to my recent resignation from the NGO. Amidst many tasks, typical of this type of event, I was assigned to help Mama Claus prepare for the distribution of gifts.

The party took place in a hall, which would usually host various events (balls, birthdays, and even evangelical services) and was located close to the train tracks. The street in front of the building was totally taken over by children and their families, so there was no place that we could hide so as not to ruin the surprise and reveal Mama Claus. I asked the neighbor if we could use her house, and she promptly responded to the request. I do not remember exactly why, but at one point I had to leave the house to do something else. This house is located in a family village. There are three houses connected by a cement alleyway that works as a backyard and that opens onto the street. I was in this space when Mr. Joaquim entered the gate. I was not surprised to see him at the party, as he used to take the girls to all events. At that moment, he was alone. He was dressed in a faded red tank top, shorts, and flip-flops, an old analog cell phone strapped to his waist. Mr. Joaquim was a man much admired by the staff of the NGOs. He was a widowed father of five children and a grandfather of two, who had zealously assumed all the functions of care and became the provider for his family after he lost his wife, which gave him an aura of respect and admiration. This is probably due to the fact that, in this context, the majority of the responsibility for families falls on women and many fathers are unknown or absent.

Since I had known him since working for NGOs, I greeted him politely. He responded to the greeting. I remember taking my cell phone out of my pocket to reply to a message. In the meantime, he came over, grabbed my arm and then pulled me to him. With both arms wrapped around me, he tried to kiss me. No authorization, no consent.

The first sensation was one of feeling naked and completely helpless, followed by anger and the urge to scream "take your hand off me, let me go!". My body, haunted by fear and the need for quick reaction, trembled and still struggled against the scent of that man's drunkenness, with the disrespectful hands that violated something that was mine. I did not scream. Even though I was in the middle of three houses, all the residents were at the party next door. Any screams would be drowned out by the noise of the party, with its music and its happy noises of children playing. Without thinking too much, I simply pushed him away and got out, taking a breath near the railway line, which borders almost the entire Complexo. A memory is still vivid: Mr. Joaquim's smiling face, when pushed, without the slightest sign of shock. At the edge of the train line, amid disused woods and construction debris, I remember feeling my eyes fill with tears, feeling sweat trickle under my blouse and inhaling-exhaling successive times, seeking a fictitious and illusory calm that would minimally guarantee that I return to the party.

It was as if at that moment, on the intersection of violence, disgust, and the perception of the inadequacy of that act, between dangers and insecurity, everything "that really matters" (Kleinman 2006) was threatened for me. Even though, without a doubt, dangers, risks, and uncertainties are something inescapable in life, a limit had been broken at that moment. At that moment, when I felt the limits of my body and of my feelings, I experienced a powerless position, since I could not fight it back. And, of course, in the midst of the state of immediate confusion, I could not guess what would be the effects of this event on my personal life and what consequences it would have for the research.

IN SEARCH FOR A LANGUAGE TO EXPRESS VIOLENCE

Taussig (2019, 3), in the first sentence of chapter 1 – "Culture of terror, space of death" -, from *Shamanism, c olonialism and the wild man*, makes the following statement: "most of us know and fear torture and the culture of terror only through the words of others". In the

same way, until then, I knew about sexual violence only through the narratives of others – through the residents, the teenagers, the network for guaranteeing rights, the media, feminist movements, reports made by friends and acquaintances, literature etc. – and I did not see myself as falling within the victim category.

I confess that it was by no means easy or comfortable to turn these memories (and revive them) into text. When I wrote the first version of this account, only a few months had passed since the harassment. There were still clear smells and reactions marked in my body. For example, every time I crossed with Mr. Joaquim, I felt goosebumps and a chill down my spine, remembering the smell of his sweat mixed with alcohol. Note that when the harassment happened, I had just started my research. In other words, over the following years, I was in the Complexo numerous times and came across Mr. Joaquim on different occasions. Each time, I tried to create some strategy to get away from him, which was not always possible since two of his daughters – still children – always wanted to greet me with at least one hug. As I stated in my fieldwork notebook, his presence was like a ghost throughout the years of my research:

> I came across Mr. Joaquim again today. He always says hi without any sign of worry. I tried to avoid him, but his younger daughter came to welcome me and to give me a hug. He even smiled, just like he smiled that day. I remember his face in detail. And now, as I am writing this diary, I also remembered his hands, calloused hands. He is a constructor and his hands are coarse. The hands that tried to violate me.

I never told any of my interlocutors, residents of the Complexo, what had happened, because I did not know the possible consequences of my account. After all, I was an "outsider", seen as a woman from another social class, who had a background of social work within the favelas. But I wrote about what happened many times, especially during the months immediately following that day. My diary has

many entries about Mr. Joaquim, as I was trying to cope with the harassment. It is my intent, in sharing the above entry, to make clear what I am calling "vulnerable writing" (Page 2017). As Page (2017, 14) affirms, vulnerable writing "describes the process of explicating and recognizing vulnerability in writing (...), a means in which to engage specifically in recognizing this aspect within the research process". As I understand it, and taking this notion further, writing vulnerably is a kind of writing that is not ashamed of itself and not worried about feelings and sensations. It is also vulnerable because it takes a lot of courage to make public and to be open to the many kinds of reactions from readers, including criticism.

It is important to note that until today Mr. Joaquim is a ghost that I am trying to haunt through writing. It was while reading Grace Cho that I came to realize that this figure of the ghost is powerful for giving meaning to experiences of violence. According to Cho (2008, 29), based on the propositions of Avery Gordon (1997), the ghost (and the "haunting effects" that it creates) is a kind of memory and "an avenue for ethical engagement with the present". In this sense, I believe that her proposition is true for my endeavor here: I am trying to articulate my memories of the abuse and violence in order to haunt this man – the figure that encompasses all my fear, trauma, and vulnerability, and acts like a ghost, always with me (although it seems "absent or nonexistent" sometimes). In a way, I hope that writing about the harassment will haunt what haunts me, not erasing it, but helping to find what this "alchemy of violence" (Cho 2008, 31) produces in my subjectivity, my personal and professional life.

During these years, my strongest impulse, however, was to try not to think about the harassment. Sometimes, to this day, I also dream of feeling trapped and screaming a lot, a dream that might reoccur because at the time I could not scream. Today, I understand that the "work of time" (Das 2007) is blurring the clarity of these sensations. I remember everything clearly, but the very material senses – smells, touch – faded away.

Today, five years later, I am greatly influenced by Dragojlovic and Samuel's (2021) proposal to carry out an "anthropology of silence": what remains unspoken and how to trace what is silenced in experiences of violence? In this sense, silence is not the lack of language, but a form of communication of its own, which makes us question the "limits of the narratable" (Dragojlovic & Samuel 2021, 2-3). For the authors, the anthropology of silence is concerned with analyzing "trace silences" and the ways we can include these in the ethnography. In this sense, an anthropology of silence considers silence as a presence and "engages with the social, political and interpersonal dynamics that silences generate" (2021, 4). It is curious to note that the notion of haunting is also important in this modality of anthropological knowledge, since it represents what escapes "verbal articulation". I am in continuous search for the traces of my own silences and trying to forge ways of making them knowable and intelligible.

Even though I have narrated the harassment I suffered, I found countless limitations, lack of words, difficulty in continuing, and a constant need to balance what I would include and what I would omit from the text. For example, the excerpt of my diary was silenced in the first article. I was not able to make it public before. Now it gains voice and becomes part of the recounting of the harassment. To this day, I cannot write about my fears of being harassed once again or about the many ways that I blamed myself for what happened. In this last case, it is difficult for me to balance the feminist researcher and the woman that suffered violence, and make visible all the contradictions involved in occupying both positions. Maybe it will always remain a silence, confined to my thoughts and in the form of feelings I cannot finds words to describe. Looking back, today I believe that these silences, present in the description, are explanatory in themselves.

When I first wrote about this topic, my primary feeling was fear, both because of the repercussions such an essay could generate and because I was afraid of being exposed, especially in the professional sphere.

At the time when I first put this experience down on paper, I was starting my postdoctoral research in the Department of Anthropology of a renowned Brazilian university. The moment coincided with the publication of a series of cases of harassment, abuse, and sexual violence (and these terms are highly contested in the depictions and analysis of violence at that moment) perpetrated by professors or by other students within the university setting in Brazil. This was also a moment when support networks for people who suffered some type of violence or attempted violence, and harassment were created. Interestingly, the issue of violence in the field was rarely talked about. And I dare to say, it still is.

As I remember, there was only a single public event that addressed the possible risks one could face during field research and, later, the publication of two special issues on the subject in a journal. The first "incarnation" (Das 2020) of this article is part of this special issue, together with the translation of the well-known text by Eva Moreno (1994) titled "*Rape in the field*". Since then, I have not had the opportunity to talk or write about the subject again, but the number of accesses to my text and the messages I received from readers made me think of the urgency to discuss this topic in greater depth, seeking to clear the "mistiness" (Taussig 2019) and the silences that seem to surround the event and haunt me. I am certainly still fearful of putting down these words, due to the difficulty of expressing and giving materiality in writing to these events, but also because I am primarily worried about the consequences of this text for me professionally, which can range from discrediting my experience to victim blaming. I believe this might be an example of what I call, inspired by Behar (1996) and Page (2017), vulnerable writing. What I am searching for is a kind of writing that it is not aiming to achieve a supposed objectivity, but that is concerned with feelings, emotions, and auto-reflexivity.

It should also be noted that my concern was never to provide a finished and systematic analysis of my harassment, but rather to experiment with writing itself, seeking to push the limits of what is sayable, of

what one manages to express. The search, since then, has been to take this personal experience as a "mode of knowing" (Behar 1996), seeking to give meaning – anthropological and personal – to subjective experiences of violence, vulnerability, and fear. I characterize this reflexive attempt as a mode of knowing because, through this personal experience, I was able to come closer to understanding the ways my interlocutors experience similar situations, and became aware of the frequent silences I encountered when talking about the intimate realm of life. It is hard to expose yourself and to admit that you suffered violence. I dealt with this situation through writing, while also questioning my own way of narrating. Nevertheless, even this attempt to think back and rewrite, aware of that which was omitted, does not solve the dilemmas. There are still silences and unspeakable moments (and perhaps we will never be able to fully represent violence and its consequences).

If I were to reconstruct the decision process to write about the topic of this article, I would say that it came, above all, from the support network I could count on formed by a few close friends, my supervisor, and my therapist. It took me about three months to be able to put into words and to confide in someone what I treated as secret and silence. In order to be able to write, it took another few months, in which I tried to convince myself of the importance of this type of exposition. Above all, I was most concerned about possible academic reactions, from colleagues who would understand a text like this as unnecessary exposure and putting at risk something that "really matters to me", namely, my professional career. A similar hesitation can be found in other reports of violence and harassment in the field. Zonjić (2021, 544), for example, writes that her greatest fear of writing about the topic was motivated by possible blaming, in what she calls "victim-blaming narrative". I also did not want to be put in this position by my academic colleagues, fearing that they could accuse me of doing research in the "wrong way" or that I had put myself in unnecessary danger.

After conversations with close colleagues and friends, many therapy sessions, and getting into deeper contact with the literature on the anthropology of emotions and other accounts of violence in the field, I gathered the courage and motivation to write. And this article was part of the healing process and fundamental for me to better understand my own experiences of violence, the naming of these acts, and the silences I found amongst my interlocutors. The women that participated in my research were always fearful of talking about intimate forms of violence, although they were quite eloquent about public violence. I have pages and pages of notes about their descriptions of the presence of the police in the favela, or about the ground covered with bullets, or even describing photographs of dead or injured bodies that I received. But when we were talking about the private sphere of life things were different. That is why I think the idea of tracing silences is so useful: it requires going beyond words, the spoken facts and paying attention to other forms of manifestation (the body for example). If, as Das (2007) states, violence is an experience of limits, what I tried to do through writing was to articulate the breaking of these limits, showing how they functioned as moments of "impasse" (Berlant 2011), which point to the ordinary character of these acts in the context in question. I will return to this discussion later.

In a way, even the mode of writing used here carries signs of vulnerability, as proposed by Behar (1996). It means that we do not have to abdicate of our emotions and experiences in the search for "academic objectivity" (Behar 1996, 30). It also implies taking into account the "question of vulnerability", something that still bothers the field of anthropology. I think the main question for Behar concerns the limits of subjectivity in an anthropological account: when the ethnographer presents herself as vulnerable, does this still count as ethnography? Or is it "too personal" (Behar 1996, 20)? With this in mind, I believe it is pertinent to think about the exposure of the self during ethnographic writing. It is valid, insofar as a reflection on the self becomes an ethnographic fact, which can lead to articulations that are otherwise impossible regarding the topic and the relationships studied.

As Behar (1996, 32) adds, “aspects of the self” can function as “filters” through which we interpret and represent what we are studying. In this specific case, the harassment is a way to reflect on the centrality of gender in the everyday lived experiences of violence that I was trying to research. Even if I was aware of the role of gender from the beginning of my research (and of course in many moments in my own life), I was vulnerable, in these contexts, for having a body recognized as female, for being alone in the field most of the time, and for not fitting in with local logics. I was just as vulnerable as the many women who told me of their experience of violence. As gender is an essential marker for understanding these realities, these same relationships applied to me. Ultimately, being a researcher, a former employee of an NGO and being recognized in these territories, was nullified by the persistence of gender, which in these relationships put me in a position of vulnerability. I am not implying that we can only understand violence after suffering violence, but that our experiences can count as an important mode of knowing the other.

It is important to recognize that it is always a challenge to forge a language and a way of writing to represent violence. This issue has been discussed by many authors in different contexts (Cho 2008; Das 2007, 2020; Taussig 2019), mostly focused on the limits of narrative and representation. At times, when talking about the Complexo at academic events, I was accused by colleagues of “spectacularizing” violence, due to the way I chose to describe and reconstruct the narratives of my interlocutors. Their argument was that sometimes my text is too literal and has a lot of (unnecessary) details that can reify violence. I have always put a lot of effort into ethnographic descriptions, the same strategy used in the narrative of my experience of harassment. I say this because it is a highly emotional narrative, both for my interlocutors, when they were describing (or silencing) their experiences to me, and for myself, since I was the one who experienced what was narrated. And certainly, for the reader. Talking about violence means dealing with a set of emotions and feelings, which, in most cases, are difficult to translate or are even unspeakable,

as I demonstrated when reflecting on silences. As I interpret my efforts, I am seeking for a way to "write effectively" (Taussig 2019) against terror and violence. And against the restlessness that the experience of violence necessarily triggers.[4]

Perhaps, some of these experiences are unspeakable and the written word, even if it uses allegories, may not be enough to demonstrate the processes that lead to the constitution and reconstitution of the subjects' worlds and the complex dynamics of feelings that writing arouses.

What I narrate here is nothing new in anthropological works. Eva Moreno (1994), in her scathing and terrifying "Rape in the Field", shows the risks involved in anthropological work, taken to the limit, when she narrates having been raped by her field research assistant. It points to issues similar to the ones I mentioned above, such as fear of exposure. Only after twenty years she was able to overcome the silence and report what had happened. The biggest fear (and she was discouraged even by her advisors) was jeopardizing her academic career: a good anthropologist would never put herself in a position that would allow her to be raped.

In the final part of her text, Moreno (1994, 246) highlights something fundamental for us to reflect on regarding situations such as those experienced by her and me: social worlds marked and determined by gender. Moreno shows how the academic world denies the importance of gender in relation to working conditions and professional possibilities, instead posing itself as a gender-free place. The problem is that, especially when carrying out fieldwork, it is impossible to maintain the fiction of the non-existence of gender. On the contrary, we are assigned and marked by gender all the times, and there is even confusion between the private and public spheres of our lives as people and anthropologists. Violence affects both spheres.

Reflecting on my experience, I take this argument further. I believe that in addition to telling us a lot about the risks and vulnerabilities

of the researcher in the field, this could also shed light on the understanding of the contexts I sought to elucidate. What this sexual harassment, this abuse (and here the categories are mine, shaped by how I understand them) shows is one of the ways in which vulnerability can appear and affect even the researcher. In an attempt to understand what makes the Other vulnerable, I was confronted with my own vulnerability in the field. Until then, I had only thought of vulnerability in the context of my field research as the constant possibility of being hit by the bullets of clashes between police and criminal groups. However, at that moment, another possibility was presented to me, other dangers that, in a way, equated some of my experiences with those I sought to study and understand.

A PARTIAL AND TENTATIVE CONCLUSION

By allowing myself to appear publicly as vulnerable, and as data has shown that gender conventions play a role in the majority of vulnerable relationships that result in harassment, I believe I have managed to forge a piece of writing that raises possibilities for a mode of knowing and producing, and, from there, give room for important reflections on vulnerabilities, violence, writing, and one's academic career. I learned from this that it is ok to cry and to produce an "anthropology that makes others cry" (Behar, 1993).

Confronting my fears and my vulnerability was one of the ways to understand these logics and narratives in relation to violence. Writing about harassment was a form of healing and it was resistance. It was my way of not being haunted, at least not entirely, by the intensity and horror of the experience of violence. Obviously, narrating this violence in a textual way does not erase it or lessen the pain, but it transforms its status, not allowing it to be paralyzing. Stewart (2007), in *Ordinary Affects*, launches the challenge of finding ways to approach "complex and uncertain objects" that affect us. I start from this same challenge, taking violence as this complex and uncertain object, which in its terrifying intensity and absurdity made me look for a way of writing, a

texture of words that could somehow express this moment. If I start from a perspective that thinks of violence as relational, I inevitably need to place myself as part of this equation. Not doing so means losing something of these intricate relationships and this two-way process of field research, in which I am affected and simultaneously affect, in many ways, my interlocutors.

Thus, I hope that it will be an addition to the important set of literature on violence in the field. I tried to demonstrate the long process of making sense of violence. Of course, I offer one way of dealing with this kind of experience. I hope, above all, for it to be read as an experiment in the midst of vulnerability, as a resistance to violence and as part of the – always unfinished – process of healing. As suggested by Veena Das (2020, 111), healing can be found in the "unremarkable everyday acts". In my case, I found the possibility for healing in writing, in questioning the "limits of the narratable" and in allowing myself to appear vulnerable in public.

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Notes

[1] Sexual violence is an umbrella term for a myriad of acts. It is an analytical term, since in Complexo they never use it to refer to intimate and gender-based forms of violence.

[2] The practice of renaming people, places, and contexts is already routine in ethnographic texts, showing how ethnography is increasingly using fictional elements that, in no way, harm the analysis or detract from its theoretical importance. As Strathern (2014, 174) shows, anthropologists construct persuasive fictions, that is, when describing, in order to convey new compositions of ideas, they resort to certain literary strategies, which create a relationship between writer – reader. Through description, anthropologists create universes. In my specific case, I create the Complexo, even if I mischaracterize some of its features and give it another name, to talk about real experiences lived by real people. The creation of fictitious names for places is a common practice in ethnographies dealing with sensitive topics.

[3] This article was published in Portuguese and in a Brazilian journal. The original title is “Vulnerabilidades, dilemas e dores: fragmentos de uma pesquisadora na/das violências”. The first version is on the references list.

[4] I thank Letícia Carvalho for remembering this word, mentioned in O Livro do Desassossego, by Fernando Pessoa. Perhaps, as she put it at that moment, when commenting on a paper of mine, what appears here is an “anthropology of restlessness”.

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