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**Conflating privilege and vulnerability. A reflexive analysis of emotions and
positionality in postgraduate fieldwork.**

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Abstract

Grounded in a self-reflexive, intersectional analysis of positionality, we examine emotions in fieldwork through the autobiographical accounts that we gathered during our postgraduate ethnographic research in the Global South. We show how we, two female early-career geographers, emotionally coped with instances that put us in a vulnerable position due to loneliness, commitment to the field, insistent questioning, violence, and violent threats. We argue that a culture of silence surrounding fieldwork difficulties and their emotional consequences tend to permeate our discipline. We contend that geography departments ought to provide mentorship that takes into account doctoral candidates' different positionalities, conflated vulnerability and privilege, and embodied intersectional axes. This renewed awareness will help not only to reveal possible risks and challenges connected with fieldwork but also ultimately to enrich the overall academic discussions within our discipline.

Keywords: *emotions; positionality; postgraduate fieldwork; privilege; vulnerability.*

Performing field research and coping physically (see Jokinen and Caretta in press) and emotionally with changing and challenging working and living conditions (see also Mukherji, Ganapati, and Rahill 2014) are conditions *sine qua non* for becoming a geographer. However, geographers often leave out the emotional impact that ethnographic work has on them and how it, in turn, affects their research (see Widdowfield 2000; Heller et al. 2011; Jones and Ficklin 2012; Smith 2016).

Geography originated during colonial times with single men travelers' and explorers' going on "expeditions" and setting up "base camps" where they could count on the assistance of local helpers who would cater to their daily needs (Katz 1996; Kearns 1997; Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Sharp and Dowler 2011). Expeditions were meant to "civilize" locals, and explorers would "speak for them" when reporting findings back in Europe. Women were deemed "unsuited ... for 'exploration' ... since geography was not about library work" (Kearns 1997, 457). Changes have occurred since that time. Lone women geographers conduct research about a wide array of geographical topics in remote locations and in different cultural environments, even though masculinist epistemology prevails (e.g., Sundberg 2003; Thien 2009; Billo and Hiemstra 2013; Ross 2015). Nevertheless, it does not appear that these changes have been implemented fully in training in geography. When and if field training to postgraduate students is provided, we argue, the average PhD candidate is still pre-conceived as a white, European, and often male researcher who is going to a place that is remote and deprived, automatically being in a privileged position. As we show in this article, women researchers find themselves in different and shifting power constellations. On the one hand, their gender and perceived lack of authority and maturity in the local society are sources of vulnerability. On the other hand, their high level of education still incarnates privilege. Along these lines, in this article, we seek to build on several examples of our changing positionality

in the field to argue for an enhanced disciplinary discussion of what more effective and nuanced PhD field training might entail.

The data for this article is derived from our autobiographical accounts two female early-career geographers who conducted their PhD research in the Global South in cross-cultural and cross-language circumstances. Martina's study focused on irrigation practices and women's participation in water management in East Africa (Caretta 2015a). Johanna's work centered on transnational labor migration and its role as a livelihood diversification strategy in rural and peri-urban villages in Bolivia (Jokinen forthcoming). Although our research sites were thousands of kilometers apart, our ethnographic emotional dilemmas have been incredibly similar. We are both white, European, childless women who, despite being based in Sweden for our postgraduate studies, gained access to our field sites in the Global South by mastering a foreign language (Swahili and Spanish), hiring assistants, and attempting to adapt to a different cultural environment. In this demanding and challenging attempt to adjust to other cultural attitudes and norms, we had to negotiate between our emotional discomfort and expectations to complete our fieldwork.

The topic of emotional engagement has only recently been examined in geography, mostly in relation to researchers' encounters with local people and struggles caused by culturally diverse research conditions (e.g., Jones and Ficklin 2012; Woon 2013; Mukherji, Ganapati, and Rahill 2014; Smith 2016). Although feminist scholars claim that emotional and methodological openness can enhance the researcher's respectability (Laliberté and Schurr 2016), geographers prefer to stick to consolidated methodologies and rarely dwell on the emotional dimensions of the research process. The idea that sharing emotional fieldwork circumstances will undermine one's scientific credibility and career still prevails within the

discipline (Katz 1996; Widdowfield 2000; Billo and Hiemstra 2013; Ross 2015). This article seeks to question this assumption by referencing contextual fieldwork incidents.

We use our lived experiences “neither out of egoism or as a confession, but because the consideration of field encounters requires intimate understanding” (Crapanzano 2010, 65).

Whereas some of the challenges that we faced and that are outlined in this article might appear trivial in comparison to what locals deal with every day, we decided to unveil our emotional trials because they are not discussed openly in our discipline. Here, we focus on the emotional dimensions of lone fieldwork for women in the early stage of their careers in geography. Professional geographers should give more consideration to postgraduate students’ emotional vulnerability and embodied reactions in the field. This awareness will serve our discipline by informing updates in research training for doctoral candidates according to the different current positionalities of researchers entering the field.

Postgraduates are at the lowest rung of the academic ladder. Although they are considered to be in a privileged position, they are often vulnerable to external circumstances in the field (Ballamingie and Johnson 2011; Mukherji, Ganapati, and Rahill 2014) and internal departmental requirements. By being mobile and highly educated, we embody privilege and power. However, our future academic career is contingent on the successful completion of our dissertation within a strict time limit, which makes us dependent, for instance, on participants’ willingness to contribute and on our supervisors’ capacity to support us before, during, and after fieldwork. These aspects require further investigation. We do this work through the lens of emotions, positionality, critical reflexivity and intersectionality to acknowledge our positionality as women and outsiders with Eurocentric biases.

We start by presenting the conceptual foundations of our analysis. Then, in three different sections, we present the emotional response that we had to episodes of loneliness,

commitment, insistent questioning, and violence. Moreover, we show how these instances influenced our research. Finally, we discuss how fieldwork preparation should be a concern for professional geographers, given the importance of creating awareness about the emotional dimension of conducting ethnographic research.

Conceptual Foundations

To disclose the dimensions of fieldwork beyond data collection, we based our analysis on emotions. Emotions are determined by the local, social, and cultural circumstances that constitute the context in which researchers, participants, and assistants interact (Bennett 2004). Emotions are crucial in the constitutive and performative act that fieldwork inherently is (Smith 2016), but they are often silenced in the analytical process (Sharp and Dowler 2011). Examining emotions produces insights into researchers' and participants' reciprocal social worlds (Bennett 2004; Lobo 2010). We analyzed emotions through the lenses of reflexivity, positionality, and intersectionality.

Reflexivity unveils the contextual and relational nature of knowledge production (Purcell 2009; Punch 2012). In this work, reflexivity materialized in the writing of our field notes. We employed two types of reflexivity: intersubjective reflection and social critique. The first highlighted the physical and emotional dimensions of daily encounters with participants and how we mediated them. The latter heightened awareness in moments of tensions caused by differences in the researcher's and the participants' positions (see Finlay 2003). Through an analysis of our field diaries, notes, and email conversations, we produced "thick descriptions" that balanced the research process "graphy" with the self "auto" (Purcell 2009). In this way, we allow the reader to fully grasp the contextual nature of knowledge production, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the research (Purcell 2009; Punch 2012).

Building on reflexivity as a social critique, we grounded our analysis in positionality. This concept refers to incorporating in our works place- and time-specific critical considerations of ourselves, our informants, respondents and participants as well as our reciprocal roles and influence on the research process (DeLyser and Karolczyk 2010). We break the silence surrounding the practice of fieldwork and its inherent constitutive power relations (see Sundberg 2003). By bringing to light the specific conditions of knowledge production that we embody not only as Western scholars but also as young lone women in cross-cultural environments, we acknowledge the various layers of inequality that are present in the field.

Additionally, we adopted an intersectional perspective in our analysis (Valentine 2007). Intersectionality was defined by feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991). With this term, she originally referred to the composite nature of oppression suffered by black women, who are victims of racial judgments and stereotypes because of their color. Geographers have advanced this concept analytically by showing the innate character of space in shaping exclusionary dynamics (see Valentine 2007; Dias and Blecha 2007; Nightingale 2011; Brown 2012). We based our analysis on this concept because the intersection of our own and participants' race, gender, class, and age is a component of our fieldwork. Multiple axes of advantage and disadvantage are intrinsic in the interactions with participants and in the way that they position our identities and relate with us. Such conditions of "otherness" embody a unique way of experiencing and being experienced through emotional engagement (see Lobo 2010).

We applied these concepts critically in our analysis in the following sections by reflexively scrutinizing the different positionalities that we had in relation to respondents and assistants, depending on gender, origin, level of education, status, and age.

Committing to the Field

Having the opportunity to travel to faraway places and to engage in learning and enriching practices with locals are privileges associated with academic work. However, as scholars, we are endowed with authority that can often be a hindrance to creating meaningful rapport with informants and respondents. In fact, our Eurocentric biases and background play a role in how we interact with and represent the subjects we research, who, for instance, might not wish to cooperate with us (Radcliff 1994; Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Raghuram and Madge 2006; Caretta 2015b; see following sections).

Mobility, or the ability to leave the field anytime, is another advantage of our scholarly work. (For an analysis of the intersection of emotions and leaving the field, see Caretta and Cheptum forthcoming; see also Jones et al. 2015). The length of our fieldwork sessions ranged from 7 to 8 weeks. During these weeks, we experienced the field as a lonely endeavor, given the remoteness of our research sites. Although our positionality of Western scholars could be interpreted as authoritative, we were also subordinated to the unspoken demands of our institutions, which expected us to complete successfully both our PhD and our fieldwork in a given timeframe (see also Porter 2009). Hence, we never cut our fieldwork short. That is, we continued to work, rather than come to terms with feelings of discomfort and loneliness (see also Ballamingie and Johnson 2011). To counteract such feelings, Price (2001) encouraged young female researchers to live with families and to gain the acceptance of women to acquire easier access to field information.

Johanna lived with a local family during her MSc thesis fieldwork in Nicaragua. She experienced several benefits. For example, she came into contact with important informants through the family, who provided her with insights into the local context and daily routines. In addition, she felt more secure being part of a local household. However, she faced some

troubles as well, including prolonged sickness due to inadequate food hygiene, restricted access to electricity and water, and uneasiness and fear of disease while sleeping in a bat-infested bedroom. Based on those experiences, she preferred to live alone in a rental apartment during her PhD fieldwork in Bolivia. While mainly conducting interviews with families in peri-urban agricultural villages, she resided in a nearby major city to obtain a tranquil working environment and occasional opportunities for leisure. Johanna sometimes did not consider herself to be a “real geographer”, as she lived alone and was not continuously taking part in locals’ everyday life activities. Nevertheless, based on her previous research experience, she preferred a private and comfortable living environment to mitigate her personal vulnerability (see also Ballamingie and Johnson 2011; Jones et al. 2015).

During her first postgraduate fieldwork experience, Johanna spent Christmas in Bolivia. Although it was not the first time she had been far away from home during the holidays, she knew that she would feel lonely because of festivities’ focus on family. To prevent such feelings, she was relieved to hear that her assistants were able to continue with field visits over Christmas.

In a text message to her assistantⁱ on December 24, 2013, Johana stated: *“Could you please send me the questionnaire? Would not it be better to meet at 8 am [on 26 December], to have enough time to plan [the field visit] before the meeting?”*

In an attempt to escape loneliness, Johanna forced herself to work nonstop, despite the holiday. By staying busy with work; participating in some social activities, such as New Year’s Eve festivities, with her assistants; and keeping in contact with her family and friends, Johanna consciously overcame the risk of feeling down. Occasions for distractions were merely based on the assistants’ kindness, which showed the shifting nature of the power

dynamics in the field (see also Chattopadhyay 2013). Without her assistants' openness, Johanna would have risked working constantly, which Billo and Hiemstra (2013) warned against because it easily leads to burn out (see also Jokinen and Caretta in press for a detailed analysis on fatigue due to physical field conditions). Hence, it is important to evaluate researchers' psychological limits before they become isolated in a remote location (Scheyvens and Nowak 2003; Billo and Hiemstra 2013). For Johanna, taking a few days away from data collection would have allowed time for reflection to come up with a plan to enhance the quality of the remaining interviews, rather than continuing on to reach a certain number of interviews. This example and Martina's uninterrupted four fieldwork sessions in the remote drylands of East Africa speak to the presumed scholarly privilege of mobility and PhD candidates' vulnerability and subordinated position within the academic hierarchy.

Participating to social gatherings provides an opportunity to learn directly from locals. This important component of fieldwork creates within the researcher a sense of commitment (Jones et al. 2015) and responsibility (Jazeel and McFarlane 2010) to give back. It also allows the researcher to gain legitimacy not only for wanting to share something with locals but also because reciprocity is a crucial dimension of indigenous life (Punch 2012). Martina produced a booklet in English, Swahili and Marakwet (the local language of Kenya). The results were discussed and disseminated during a 10-day workshop, and the booklet is currently being used in civics classes at local elementary schools (Caretta in press; Porter 2009; cf. Ballamingie and Johnson 2011). According to other feminist geographers (see e.g., Sharp 2005), her commitment had a direct impact on locals. Still, it did not help to erase the apparent divide between the participants and Martina, who had another life somewhere else and could unplug from the field if needed (see also Jones et al. 2015). Similarly, Johanna used her position as a privileged scholar with technical means to improve the cartographical

knowledge and GIS skills of local scholars who could ultimately provide respondents with better maps and help agricultural communities to counteract illegal land acquisition. It was most natural for Johanna to conduct GIS exercises with her assistants working at the research center, given that they shared common interests and were academics of the same age, while still indirectly helping the interviewed smallholders. As two of Johanna's assistants were beginning their doctoral studies, the experience of being in the field actually helped them to start their research while Johanna shared her methodological knowledge with them (see also Jones et al. 2015). It can be argued that both Martina and Johanna, in their commitment to the field, embodied scholarly knowledge and power. However, it should be acknowledged that knowledge sharing and dissemination outside academia is not a high ethical priority for researchers (Scott, Miller, and Lloyd 2006; Fahey and Kenway 2010).

Being Probed by the Field

Martina transgressed local norms in Kenya and Tanzania. As a white, solo, unmarried, childfree woman, she did not fit into any of the local social or cultural categories. In her diary, on June 10, 2011, Martina wrote, *"The very first question people ask me is if I am married and I have children. I say 'no' and then they say 'ok, then you live with your parents, right?'. When I say I don't, their face becomes undecipherable."*

Being positioned as a woman of childbearing age shifted the power dynamics, as she could be questioned (see also Chattopadhyay 2013). Although her private life was not meant to be a recurring topic of discussion with participants, Martina, who had recently moved in with her partner, said she was married by her second fieldwork. As other scholars (Katz 1996; Ross 2015), Martina told a white lie to avoid further questioning. Again, her position shifted.

According to participants, her marital status was now the precursor to having children. On January 25, 2012, Martina wrote the following in her diary: *"I have told people I am married*

and then, right away, there you go again: 'When will you have children?' How to explain that to be 26 and childless couple is ok in Sweden? Elders laugh at me. I am puzzled. I feel I open up and I am somehow rejected."

Martina's supposed authoritative position of Western scholar shifted in those instances, as she was looked upon as a woman who could be tried (Faria and Mollett 2016). Accordingly, a simple interview entailed more than data collection. It became about becoming acquainted with another culture, creating relationships, and developing personally and professionally (see also Heller et al. 2011). Openness can trigger curiosity and emotions in research participants. Consequently, independent of the topic at hand, the intimacy and friendship involved in data gathering can be emotionally demanding for a researcher (Myers 2001; Chattopadhyay 2013; Smith 2016). For instance, Martina often heard stories about gender violence and female genital mutilation. As a feminist geographer and a firm believer in gender equality, it was challenging for her to maintain her composure. Objectivity in such circumstances is impossible to achieve (see also Haraway 1988). These instances were useful in the development of situated knowledge with the help of her research assistants, who played the role of cultural brokers (Haraway 1988; Caretta 2015b). Instead of drawing comparisons between the society from where she came and the local one, Martina took the opportunity to ask for clarification. This approach helped her to understand the crucial link between control over water, control over women's bodies, and femininity, which were central components of her PhD thesis (see Caretta 2015a).

A commonly held idea about well-being in the West tends to create expectations in local community members that the researcher can assist them with different favors (Punch 2012; Jones et al. 2015), such as finding employment and emigrating, as occurred to Johanna when interviewing farmers about their family migration history.

Johanna's email to Martina on January 26, 2014 stated: *I was offered 15,000 USD if I help a Bolivian guy to migrate to Sweden by saying that we cohabit... I did not know what to say and when I declined, they tried to talk me into doing it by telling it only takes two years for him to gain his own right to stay in Sweden.*

Johanna was visiting the family with her two assistants, who were more embarrassed and shocked than she was. The incident shows "the unexpected when negotiating relationships with participants" (Jones and Ficklin 2012, 108). Having brought her assistants with her as support, Johanna had to mitigate their bewilderment in addition to her own.

Although the migrant incident was challenging, Johanna obtained valuable information for her study. It affirmed the preparedness to emigrate of families, which is often based on extended family members' desire (cf. Punch 2012). At the same time, it showed the egoism of Johanna's research interest and the limits of her commitment (see also Jones et al. 2015). Johanna's position shifted in relation to respondents and assistants (see also Chattopadhyay 2013). On the one hand, the interviewed family and Johanna shared the experience of being migrants in Sweden; therefore, Johanna could relate to the problems they faced as foreigners in Swedish society (cf. Lobo 2010). Hence, Johanna and the respondents were positioned more closely, whereas the assistants who normally played a mediating role were left out because they had never emigrated. On the other hand, given her academic background and ability to speak Swedish fluently, Johanna was in a privileged position, which was closer to that of her highly educated Bolivian assistants.

Perceiving Johanna as a young, unmarried, and naïve female researcher, the family misinterpreted Johanna's genuine interest in their migration (cf. Yassour-Borochowitz 2012). This incident revealed how the family positioned Johanna and how emotional involvement

during interviews created both trust and boundaries (Lobo 2010). Emotional disclosure resulted in a boundary between the researcher and the researched, as Johanna dropped her plans for follow-up interviews with the household's out-migrant family members living in Sweden. At the same time, this embodied experience of tension helped her to understand how the interviewed family thought of migration as a merely economic household strategy. She rarely had been part of such an intimate discussion when interviewing other households, but her background as a Swedish resident and unmarried woman triggered the conversation. Thus, she deepened her situated knowledge (see Haraway 1988) due to what she embodied for this family. As a Scandinavian, single, young woman, Johanna was relieved that she had visited the family with her assistants, as she otherwise would have felt more vulnerable due to the family's questioning of her private life. Whereas the family showed agency by completely changing the interview's objective, Johanna was ultimately in control of the research process because she could walk away and make use of the family's plea as data (cf. Porter 2009; Myers 2001). Nevertheless, the ethical dilemma remains regarding how to write about the experience because the data were based on intimate conversations surrounded by complex power relations. These methodological and analytical challenges should be addressed by geographers not only to provide guidance to junior researchers within the discipline but also to trigger larger debate.

Enduring the Field

In total, Martina spent more than six months in two remote locations of Kenya and Tanzania, learning Swahili and living on her own or with her assistants in houses infested by rats with or without limited access to electricity, water, a telephone, and a network connection. In both cases, she lived close to primary schools where corporal punishment was enforced. Although campaigns have been waged against it and legislation prohibiting it exists, educational

ministries and school teachers have been remarkably resistant to phasing out beating students as a way of disciplining them (Harber 2004; Mweru 2010). Corporal punishment is part of the colonial legacy in East Africa, a testimony to the control over the population that was applied during colonial times. (For an analysis on this, see Harber 2004).

In her diary, on August, 2013, Martina wrote: *Being at home in the morning is hard. I hear a lot of screaming 'Ache Kelele!' [stop the noise in Kiswahili] coming from the school. Teachers and class monitors keep on shouting to the students. If they have come late or have forgotten their homework the students are lined up by the window and caned. I can see everything from behind my curtains. The cane cuts the air like a whistle, hits the child on his/her back, arms and legs and then comes the sound of the children gasping for air.*

Enforced on a continuous basis several times a day during and after class, corporal punishment was a shocking experience for Martina to witness. It physiologically affected not only Martina but also an MA student whom she was supervising in the field in Kenya in 2012.

However, this traumatic experience was also an opportunity to reflect on the implications of living by the school and on the importance of living arrangements in remote locations. Although living by the school was an emotionally charged experience, it also gave Martina the chance to learn about local social norms that were not part of her research. In this sense, she acquired more comprehensive situated knowledge that transcended water management and gender relations, which appeared to her to be completely irrelevant in the face of more pressing issues, such as students' education and endemic violence (see also Widdowfield 2000). This realization generated a sense of frustration and powerlessness that Martina could not express to anyone.

On June 28, 2011, she wrote the following in her diary: *Last night I could for once make the beating stop. The teachers invited me to see what the 300 children living in the boarding school are given for dinner. It was an unappetizing mix of ugali [maize flour] and black beans which they eat from a bowl while sitting on the rocks outside the school. I realized that if students do not line up well they are beaten also while getting their dinner. I asked the teacher to let me serve the dinner and the children were all so surprised that they turned all silent and so there was no reason for beating. What a relief. I want to serve dinner also tonight. At least I feel I am avoiding them some scars.*

The head teacher and all other teachers were in overwhelming agreement that corporal punishment was necessary to discipline children and that they had the parents' authorization to carry out the beatings (see also Mweru 2010). Aware of her being an outsider, Martina voiced her concern with her assistant. In these moments, Martina's subject position shifted. When conducting her investigation in her role of Western researcher, she was in a position of control and power over the course of the research. However, when this task was over, in her free time with locals, she witnessed violent scenes with which she could not cope. In these instances, she was an outsider who could not understand local social dynamics and feared voicing her opposition to these practices. She found herself in a vulnerable position. As she was afraid of being judged and misunderstood, she did not challenge the practice of corporal punishment with the head teacher (see also Ballamingie and Johnson 2011). Ultimately, by avoiding bringing up this topic and possibly triggering a discussion about educational measures, Martina did not produce any change in the teachers' behaviors. This case

epitomizes failure in the open and relational research process advocated by feminist scholars (see also Smith 2016).

Her ability to understand Swahili made Martina aware of conversations going on around her. Some of them were particularly impactful. For instance, joking about female genital mutilation was accepted in the local culture. Moreover, using demeaning and commanding language toward women was common, as were comments about Martina and her physical appearance. These occurrences made her feel unsafe, given that people knew where she was living because she was the only white woman in the whole village. Never had she felt as scared as when a drunk man started running after her and her female assistant. As Martina wrote on August 29, 2013 in the following short diary passage, “violence in its unpredictable nature that defies any reasonable calculation” (Woon 2013, 36).

Catherine [research assistant] and I were walking back home today when a man came out from a boma [Maasai traditional compound] and started shouting: ‘I am coming for you! You white woman!’ He was visibly drunk and he stumbled running towards us. I got a rush of adrenaline and started running very fast, but Catherine with her sandals couldn’t follow as quickly. Finally, we lost sight of him after a few hundred meters. Hours after I am still shaking thinking of what could have occurred to us.

Although endemic violence against women and children and among men characterizes the local society, Martina had not considered that she could be attacked personally. This oversight, coupled with the general assumption that walking around while doing research was not dangerous, although it often turns out to be (see Lee-Treweek and Linkogle 2000), left Martina unprepared and vulnerable. Although she had become aware that both domestic and school violence were pervasive in the communities where she was researching, due to her

Eurocentric bias and perception of being in a privileged position that would prevent anyone from daring to physically attack her, she thought that she would be safe. However, it became clear that her being visible due to her unique positionality should be a source of worry. The man's screaming "white woman" made apparent Martina's embodied condition and how it could play against her. As Faria and Mollett (2016, 86) stated, "whiteness, and the colonial pasts and presents (that) give it meaning certainly engendered admiration and entitlements, but could also evoke negative, less-well explored reactions".

Whereas this episode did not influence Martina's data collection, it certainly made her feel constantly vulnerable, nervous, and eager to leave. Witnessing violence and being threatened made Martina vulnerable and added a level of emotional engagement that she had not anticipated before setting off into the field (see also Ballamingie and Johnson 2011; Chattopadhyay 2013). These traumatic experiences tainted her memories of fieldwork and made her reassess the danger associated with conducting research in such a remote and different environment. This instance typifies the risks related to sexual harassment that have the potential to affect women's fieldwork, according to Ross (2015). Yet, Woon (2013) asserted that witnessing violence gives the researcher deeper insight into the local circumstances and, as in the case of Martina and her assistant, reduces the distance and power hierarchy between the researcher and the research assistant because they shared the same violent event. Although they would spend practically the whole day together completing fieldwork, this situation certainly brought Catherine and Martina closer. Having escaped a violent attack sparked numerous conversations on the condition of women in local society and the frequency of domestic violence as well as on how they were connected to men's drinking habits. In the privacy of Catherine's home, they shared not only their fear and shock but also practical measures that women could put into place to gain more autonomy.

Following these conversations, they started working more closely with the two existing local women groups, encouraging women to strengthen their reciprocal support and to enhance their collaboration to acquire more economic independence from their husbands. (For a full analysis on this, see Caretta 2015b).

In hindsight, Martina was unprepared, given that the potential risks that Western female PhD candidates could incur in certain research contexts had not been brought up at any stage of her research preparation. This dearth of reflection on researcher positionality from an intersectional perspective speaks volume to the entrenched masculinity and privilege of geographers' doctoral education. Threats and attempts to commit sexual assault in the field remain rarely reported by female scholars who do not want to demean research subjects and do not want these episodes to work against their future career in academia (e.g., Ross 2015). We contend that these incidents should be shared with colleagues and discussed in their complexity, as they reveal the harshness of field circumstances and the ways in which researchers have coped with them. They also might explain why researchers give up on fieldwork. Particularly in the case of PhD candidates, this episode epitomizes how privilege and vulnerability intertwine. It is believed that Western scholars can pull out a credit card and fly home anytime (Jones et al. 2015). However, it might not always be the case for students who are under time and funding pressures to complete their PhD work (see also Ballamingie and Johnson 2011). Martina's case falls into these categories. Without a connection to the outside world and having an agreement with a driver to be picked up after three weeks, she remained for weeks in the school compound, bearing the traumatic brunt of violent scenes and sounds.

Concluding discussion

Before leaving for East Africa and Bolivia, the possibility of facing the described difficulties was not mentioned in discussions with our supervisors or when presenting our research proposals. Although it is starting to be challenged (Katz 1996; Widdowfield 2000; Sundberg 2003; Lobo 2010; Laliberté and Schurr 2016), a culture of silence in regard to fieldwork dilemmas prevails within geography.

The discipline of geography should commit to preparing its early career and future scholars to make the most of these challenges, as loneliness, discomfort, frustration and shock often support the learning process (Scheyvens and Nowak 2003), by addressing them in introductory PhD courses (see also Sundberg 2003; Caretta, Kuns, and Webster 2014), in meetings with supervisors and when presenting research proposals at departmental seminars. Supervisors play a pivotal role in preparing and warning doctoral candidates about potential physical and emotional challenges that they might face. Discussions need to be plentiful and open, as reflecting on episodes, such as the ones mentioned above, which might leave a researcher at a loss emotionally is crucial to understanding what doctoral candidates can expect. Awareness should be raised about emotional strain in ethnographic residential fieldwork so that early-career geographers have the means or at the least are given the appropriate tools to address such emotional hurdles. Moreover, emotional engagement does not end with fieldwork, as coding implies having to relive emotionally loaded encounters. The average doctoral candidate in geography is no longer a Western, white male. Intersectionality should be taken into account when preparing for the field and revealing the possible risks linked with one's positionality. Women face gender-specific field challenges, as we have shown above, that male supervisors might not necessarily have experienced. Therefore, an extended supervisory network across cultures and genders is appropriate.

Senior professional geographers have an important role in PhD research planning in guiding students in recognizing and avoiding potential dangers during field studies (Yassour-Borochowitz 2012). Hence, contact should be kept with the supervisor, as it is an opportunity for the student to monitor and discuss the research context and the feelings generated by it.

It has been easier for us to share difficult fieldwork situations among postgraduate colleagues, rather than bringing up these struggles in meetings with supervisors and in our departments.

However, through debriefing with peers and supervisors, researchers can reflect on the emotional impact of ethnography (Rager 2005). In geography, however, debriefing is briefly, if ever, done with one's supervisor after fieldwork. Furthermore, it primarily focuses on data collection. Although there are no guidelines on how such debriefing should be done, supervisors, who might not have similar experiences to their students, should be made aware of the importance of reflecting on emotional stress that students might experience during and after fieldwork (Yeun 1990).

By not employing reflexivity through the lens of intersectionality and emotions, geographers miss out on relevant data for analysis (Bennett 2004). Additionally, the validity and trustworthiness of geographical research will only be enhanced by sharing emotions, which can constitute a source of data through a psychologically liberating practice while providing colleagues with food for thought (Bennett 2004).

This article argues for heightened disciplinary debate and awareness surrounding fieldwork preparation and open communication among geographers about unexpected fieldwork scenarios beyond data collection needs. As Sharp and Dowler (2011, 151) argued, "the field is part of a much larger institution". Hence, geography departments have the duty and responsibility to improve fieldwork preparation practices by supporting postgraduates in our discipline who currently embody different positionalities and intersectional axes, conflating

vulnerability and privilege. This renewed awareness will not only help to reveal possible risks and challenges connected with fieldwork but also ultimately enrich the overall academic discussions within our discipline.

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