

# Feet of Clay: Confronting Emotional Challenges in the Ethnographic Experience

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## Biographical Details:

The author has a background in ethnographic field work focusing on social exclusion. In 2005, the author studied identity and exclusion on the rural coast of Ecuador. In 2007, the author worked as an activist and an anthropologist for the Tanzanian NGO, HIMS, Health Integrated Multi-sectoral Services, whose primary efforts are to reduce social exclusion within Tanzanian society. In this capacity, the author worked with a number of excluded groups including, single mothers, people living with HIV/AIDS, orphans, street children, and the indigenous Maasai.

Currently the author is a PhD candidate focusing on *Identifying the Underlying Push/Pull Factors which Reinforce Human Traffic*. Ethnographic field work in 2009-10 was conducted in Guatemala while working with the organization MuJER, Women for Justice, Education, and Awareness. As such, the author worked closely with sex workers and former traffic victims in and around the capital gathering data to be analyzed and compiled in 2011-12. This project focuses on the extreme social exclusion within Guatemala society and how that relates to the push/pull factors of Human Trafficking.

## Structured Abstract:

Ethnographers, as tools of data collection, are uniquely positioned in a paradoxical relationship between intense immersion and objective distance from research and participants. This relationship can be particularly intense when researching hidden or marginalized communities in violent contexts (Nordsrom & Robben, 1995). The emotional consequences of research on the researcher, until recently however, have rarely been discussed and precious little literature exists on the topic. The resulting lack of awareness surrounding those issues, means that when emotions in research are revealed, researchers can find themselves confronted with stigma surrounding issues of subjectivity, 'going native' and even implications of failed research. Drawing on the research of Lee (1995), Hume (2007), and Nordstrom and Robben (1995) this article presents a reflexive analysis of my ethnographic PhD experience. It examines the transformation undertaken to adapt and cope with in-depth research with vulnerable groups in dangerous environments. It also explores the post field work transition and consequences of post traumatic stress syndrome which were viewed as my feet of clay, or possible weakness which could derail or even invalidate the research.

## Keywords:

Ethnography, Emotions, PTSD, Trauma, Guatemala, Violence

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*“Courage does not always roar.  
Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying,  
‘I will try again tomorrow’” (Radmacher, 2009)*

## Introduction

The ethnographic experience is a process of growing awareness and transformation which requires researchers to blur the lines between personal and professional spheres. It can be described as the intensely social process of being in the field, encompassing a range of intellectual, practical, and emotional challenges, all of which are more acute when conducting ethnography in dangerous contexts with vulnerable groups about distressing topics (Punch, 2012 p. 4). Risks exist in any ethnography and must be managed in order to keep the researcher's personal reactions from distorting the research. These risks can be physical, including assault and rape, or medical including infections, accidents, and disease, and also psychological including conditioning, secondary trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These risks can be managed through local knowledge, however, “such knowledge is an aim rather than a resource for fieldworkers” (Lee, 1995 p. vii). The transition from tourist to researcher can be a dramatic one. The personal transformation I underwent in order to adapt to an environment of violence, heightened insecurity and fear was the most dramatic of my life.

To live and work in a country with a homicide rate twelve times that of the United States, four times that of Mexico and considered the fourth most murderous country in the world (Tran, 2011 p. 1), requires a physical and psychological commitment that I was, to say the least, unprepared for. This is not to say that I was inexperienced either in ethnography, or conducting research in the developing world. Guatemala was my third ethnographic experience. I have conducted field work in various capacities, researching social exclusion in the developing world. In 2005, I studied identity and exclusion on the rural coast of Ecuador. In 2007, I worked as an activist and an anthropologist for the Tanzanian NGO, HIMS, Health Integrated Multi-sectoral Services, whose primary efforts were to reduce social exclusion within Tanzanian society. In this capacity, I worked with a number of excluded groups including single mothers, people living with HIV/AIDS, orphans, street children and the indigenous Maasai. Yet, the most significant difference between these ethnographies and the research I conducted in Guatemala was the element of post-war violence that had escalated into the present atmosphere of extreme insecurity and fear. In June of 2009 I moved to Guatemala for a year in order to research the push/pull factors in society that reinforce sex traffic. The further along I was in the research, the more time I spent in that atmosphere, the more experiences of violence accumulated, the more I struggled to continue with the work.

Yet these struggles are seldom examined in detail, and the “practical and personal challenges of fieldwork, including logistics, emotions, academic worries and guilt, remain complex and often unresolved yet are still relatively rarely discussed in methodological accounts” (Punch, 2012 p. 2). Also, in my experience, there seems to be contention among researchers as to the extent emotions are personal and outside the professional sphere of methodology. How much is too much and can emotions cloud or contaminate the science. This established debate in Feminist research questions to what extent are expectations of objectivity unrealistic even harmful to the research and researcher (Holland, et al., 1995 p. 227-228)? To what degree are emotions a strength or a weakness in ethnography? This article touches on some issues of those debates while primarily arguing that there is an inadequacy of recognition and support for the emotional consequences of ethnography. Despite the important works by Lee-Treweek & Linkogle (2000), Lee (1995), Hume (2007), Punch (2012), and Nordstrom & Robben (1995) the available literature often remains non-explicit about emotions in ethnography and there is very little awareness about the prevalence of secondary trauma<sup>1</sup> or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)<sup>2</sup> among researchers. By examining my own most recent

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<sup>1</sup> Secondary trauma, also known as “compassion fatigue” and “vicarious traumatization” are reactions to the emotional demands of exposure to trauma survivors’ terrifying, horrifying, shocking and intrusive traumatic memories (Jenkins & Baird, 2002 p. 423)

<sup>2</sup> Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, (PTSD) develops after exposure to an extreme stressor or traumatic event which was responded to with fear, helplessness, or horror and is characterized by three distinct types of symptoms consisting of re-experiencing of the event, avoidance of reminders of the event, and hyper-arousal occurring for at least one month (Yehuda, 2002 p. 108)

ethnographic experience, I explore whether researchers can make more explicit the relationship between emotional validity and transparency in order to provide adequate recognition, guidance and support for future ethnographers.

This article begins by looking at the initial process of entering the field and culture shock followed by an exploration the violence settings and the adjustment to existential shock. In doing so this article seeks to raise awareness about the emotional consequences of the research on the researcher and highlight gaps in support and training for those consequences in ethnography. This article asserts that emotions, particularly empathy, are integral to the data gathering process and in constructing valid data. It examines the vulnerability that accompanies empathy by examining the isolating consequences of the insider/outsider dichotomy. An analysis of the environment's impact on the researcher as well as the research is presented throughout the ethnographic process from entering the field to post-fieldwork analysis. A reflexive look at the post-field work aspect of research reveals how transparency is expected in overall methods except for emotional effects which are fundamental to validity of data. By exploring the personal/professional divide this article reveals issues surrounding PTSD in researchers and emotional stigma in research. Finally this article demonstrates how stigma perpetuates difficulties in coping with emotional inadequacies and constrained emotional growth. Ultimately, this article highlights a gap and need for recognition, guidance and support.

## Entry into the Field

In order to examine emotional validity there needs to be a reflexive analysis of the growth and transformation undertaken by the researcher who copes and adapts to the new field environments. An important point in the process of field work is the initial entry into the field. Culture shock is the unavoidable stress a person experiences when moving to a new culture (Zapf, 1991 p. 105). It is a term that describes the sudden immersion into uncertainty and the process of adjustment to that unfamiliar environment (Pedersen, 1995 p. 1). Having lived in over five countries on more than three continents around the world, I am very familiar with this early multi-stage experience which begins the process of moving from estrangement to acclimation in a new country (Hammersely, et al., 1995 p. 102; Hume, et al., 2004 p. xiv). More importantly, researchers are most vulnerable early in the field experience because they lack the situational awareness which allows for a competence in assessing potential danger (Lee, 1995 p. 74). Researchers have various methods of coping with this step, for my part, I sought to cushion the effects of culture shock by enrolling in a university culture and language course taught by local indigenous teachers. This summer semester course helped my initial safe adjustment to Guatemala while I decided how I would access the target population of traffic victims. Because of the elusive nature of human traffic, its links with organized crime and the obvious risks associated with field work in human traffic, access is limited at best (Kara, 2008 p. xiv; Bales, 1999 p. 37; Malarek, 2004 p. 26). Nevertheless, the line which separate victims of sex traffic and the consensual sex workers is often crossed numerous times by the same people (Malarek, 2004 p. 203). Therefore the sex worker community became the target population.

Arguably, access into research relevant social settings is one of the most difficult and important stages of ethnography (Bryman, 2004, p. 294). Initial access as well as ongoing access is central to ethnographic methodology. At times the best place to access vulnerable or hidden populations are also in dangerous places. Access to the sex worker community was sought through a local Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) empowering the women through educational and vocational projects located in the capital. The capital of Guatemala, Guatemala City, itself is a key location for human traffic according to the human traffic literature, "the sex industry in Guatemala and in particular, Guatemala City—has shown enormous growth in recent years, so that some now refer to Guatemala as 'the new Thailand'" (Farr, 2005 p. 155). Access into the sex worker community can be a risky and difficult prospect, yet my affiliation to the NGO provided nominal security in Guatemala City; arguably the most dangerous place in Guatemala and "now one of the most dangerous cities on the planet" (O'Neill, et al., 2011 p. 2).

## Emotional Investment

In addition to enabling access to the red-light district, the NGO's Centre of Empowerment provided a safe space to conduct interviews. In order to earn the trust and access from the research participants I first had to establish a relationship with workers of the organization, and then gradually the research participant population of sex workers. This access was earned through empathy and a dedication to give back to the research participants as a volunteer. First, I developed a relationship with the fellow NGO workers by performing menial tasks like preparing coffee for them, assisting with chores such as cleaning, offering to help where-ever possible and participating in day to day life. Gaining and maintaining access is a constant give and take of time and resources. It involves a continuous web of observation, understanding and negotiating the ever changing relationships and roles (Schwartzman 1993:53-54) while observing ethical codes and uncovering relevant data. I began conducting translation work, later I began teaching English and tutoring in literacy and primary school classes, helping with computer problems, and soon after at their request, I designed and delivered a dance aerobics class twice a week. I developed a very good rapport with the woman in my

classes because of my patient and encouraging teaching style. It was clear that the constituents responded well to an open forum of learning environment as attendance increased and additional classes were requested. All of these activities assisted in building rapport within the research population.

Furthermore, I remained committed to and motivated by the potential positive impact of research and social activism. While in Guatemala I participated in numerous activities including workshops and marches. I volunteered with fellow NGOs including two night visits into the red-light districts to deliver condoms and lubricant to sex workers. I felt that it was important for the target research population to see that I was willing to stand with them for their rights; that I sought a positive investment in their future. This helped to build solidarity and a trusting relationship, along with providing insight into what the research participants' value and how these values guide actions. Academic claims surrounding the importance of hard science, pure research and objectivity have led harsh criticisms of practitioners of social activism and proponents for social change (Manz, 2008 p. 158). While objectivity is an important tool, it does not need to become an excuse for inaction in the face of suffering, similarly so cultural relativism is an important tool for researchers to try to understand the perspective of research participants, but it does not have to become a justification to facilitate continued injustice. According to Falla, objectivity and analytical rigor are essential in social science; however, he also asserts that researchers *should* be affected by injustice so as to understand the victims' perspective (Falla, et al., 2000 pp. 45-46). Arguably, the significance of fieldwork lies in how close researchers can get to the phenomena and penetrate scenes to foster understandings, not how they sustained distance from the data (Adler, 1990 p. 97). Thus objectivity can be a lofty goal when ethnographic participation is described as more than taking part, but involves the persistent, active and consensual involvement with people (Winton, 2007 p. 500) and the relationships between those people. Participant observation is therefore inherently "messy, complicated, and often emotionally fraught interactions between two or more human beings, one of whom is the researcher" (Hume and Mulcock 2004: xviii). By adopting the different roles of researcher, volunteer, teacher, student and activist, at various times it was inevitable that the boundaries between those roles were blurred. As such, preserving the balance of research and reciprocity was an ever present struggle. While these activities were vastly time consuming, they allowed me to establish confidence and a positive presence among the research population. The emotional consequences of this active prolonged involvement were more than simply a by-product of research, but were more accurately a part of the data gathering process. Emotional investment in the research and participants, however, was further impacted upon by the dangerous contexts in which data was gathered.

## Reflexivity and Positionality

Reflexivity is the critical consideration of the researcher's self, their biases within the research and those effects on the research (Jacobs-Huey, 2002, p. 791; Rose, 1997, p. 308). Positionality (Chiseri-Strater, 1996, p. 116) is the means for researchers to examine, "how the self impacts upon the data generated, but it tends to do so in a relatively safe manner by focusing on social categories such as gender, class, ethnicity rather than on more controversial issues such as personality and emotions" (Punch, 2012, p. 87). These attributes are ethically required for disclosure in ethnographic research as they affect the data. The social categories in which I fit are; near-thirty-years-old, North American, female of relatively white ethnicity, from working class background. I come from a Floridian culture and have been told that at times I speak with a southern American accent. What is less commonly included in researchers reflexive discussions are our own personal experiences like I come from a number of broken homes, have experienced domestic violence, abandonment, and for a short time was living on the streets. These defining social experiences are not readily included in textual research accounts, in spite of what Hume explains is important to realize,

*What I conceive of as normal had been shaped by structures within society such as family, educational system and political discourse. My role as a researcher of violence cannot be divorced from my lived experience. Listening to the narratives of violence of my research participants chimed with some of my lived experiences of my own context. (Hume 2007, p. 148)*

These lived experiences can be seen as both strengths and weaknesses with regards to the research. They can add to the ethnographer's understanding of the lived experience of violence, but they can also create a new emotional link to a past vulnerability leaving the researcher vulnerable to unearthing emotions from our pasts. Thus revealing how transparency is expected in overall methods; with a tendency to exclude emotions which are fundamental to validity of data.

A researcher's position is convoluted in the complex fluidity of the insider/outsider position. This position was compounded because I was a North American researcher in Guatemala, a Central Latin American country, researching sex workers and former traffic victims. I spoke Spanish to communicate with the research participants which for me

was a second language. Researching in a language and culture that is not your own can be a constant source of frustration when even the most casual nuances of society such as humour become a struggle. I was always conscious that the research participants were positioning me as they adjusted to my presence in their social world (Roberts 2001:3). My ethnicity and accent were obvious determinants to first impressions with research participants. As such, I had to always consider that my "role was embedded within a colonial relationship between the United States and Latin America" (Lee 1995:24). I was sensitive to my own position of privilege in relation to the women studied. According to Rose, this privilege can be "understood as entailing greater access both to material resource and to the power inherent in the production of knowledges about others" (1997:307). Given this privileged position, I took precautions to maintain a subservient rather than a superior *image* (Punch 2012:89). I felt that it was important to ask questions to establish my status as a student of Guatemalan culture, eager to learn, and ready to respect the people and culture I was studying. I tended to rely on the value of social interaction without needing in-depth conversation. I was frequently the first to offer to make someone a coffee or give someone my chair, demonstrating esteem while earning respect among participants. As time passed, I was entrusted with more and more of the personal struggles of research participants. I never sought the responsibility of solving someone's problems, nor was I a qualified counsellor, but was available for listening when requested.

## Safety Investment and Dangers

The NGO provided safe access to the target population; however, remaining only within the walls of the NGO's Empowerment Centre would have biased the sample population to only those willing and able to seek empowerment. For a more representative sample of the community, I felt that I needed to access the more marginalized of the population. Access into the sex worker community outside the safe walls of the centre occurred weekly as the office closed in order for staff to visit the oldest red-light district in Guatemala City. These visits served a number of purposes including, fact finding missions, human rights education and solidarity building activities as well as a means to invite and connect with new sex workers moving around the city. The ever present danger of the capital city is described by Benson et al. as a "symbol of urban violence" in which,

*On average, 250 people are murdered each month in the capital. Armed robbers attack vehicles on main roads in broad daylight. People who regularly ride public buses (the only mode of transportation available to most) expect to be victimized when they travel. Images of bloody corpse and bullet-ridden cars dominate the mass media. The genuine reality of violence is sensationalized, made into a commodity sold on street corners and on television screens (Moser and Winton 2002). Guatemala remains a dangerous place and the question of just who is to blame is the subject of regular conversation. (2008 pp. 38-39)*

Living in this environment meant that throughout the year it was impossible to feel secure amongst soaring death rates. I rented a small room near the airport and in the first month of my living there a man was murdered down the street. The body was removed quickly, but his blood stained the road for days. In my building, like many in the developing world, an armed security guard kept watch at night. In order to reduce personal risk, when I traveled alone I avoided public transportation which were frequent targets of attack. I employed a driver who worked for other local NGOs. During this time, on my daily route to work past the airport both the driver and I felt the tension of a possible attack. One evening outside my apartment building there was a shooting. These events illustrate that in Guatemala, insecurity pervaded all spheres of life both personal and professional. A daily bombardment of violence was a difficult adjustment. Eventually, I stopped watching the news because I could not escape from the everydayness of insecurity.

In *Dangerous Fieldwork*, Lee identifies two kinds of dangers which can occur in the research process, "*ambient* and the *situational*" (1995 p. 3). According to Lee, ambient danger arises from otherwise avoidable risk in a dangerous setting wherever the research is being carried out, whereas situational danger is evoked by the researcher's presence or actions (1995 p. 3). Situational danger tends to arise from participant rather than non-participant research as the partaking in activities leaves researchers exposed to the danger, unable to rely on relative safe-distance observation. Such extreme exposure can be physical and also psychological. Situational danger can be provoked in a number of ways, for example by researchers from the developed world living and working in the developing world. Specifically, in many impoverished countries, a Caucasian European or North American are often associated with money; as such skin color can translate into a potential target. Additionally, in a fervent patriarchal society, being a woman puts a researcher at risk (Hume, et al., 2004 p. 7). Women in Guatemala are exceptionally targeted for violence known as femicide. Femicide is the murder of a woman because she is a woman (GGM, 2008; GGM, 2006; Benson, et al., 2008 p. 51; Carey, et al., 2010 p. 143; Caissie, 2010). Gender based motives include rape, sexual torture and mutilation followed by bodies often being left in very public spaces. Moreover, in recent decades, the US American popular culture has been exporting increasingly sexualized images which translate into an international perception of North American women wanting more sex than other woman. This is a dangerous perception to confront in a country where femicide and rape are appallingly common methods to assert power over a woman (Medicos Sin Frontera, 2009).

In addition to the ambient danger of working in what the International Crisis Group calls, “one of the world’s most dangerous countries, with some 6,500 murders in 2009, more than the average yearly killings during the civil war” (International Crisis Group, 2010), I was also working with a traditionally targeted and stigmatized social group, sex workers. I regularly collected data in red-light districts considered some of the most violent areas of the city and controlled by gangs. These are areas where homicide and assault are common place and the gangs maintain supreme power through murder, impunity and fear. Imagine you had to continue to work in your office after a number of your colleagues had been murdered and those same murderers were still patrolling the halls and hassling you, while you choke down a fear for yours and your team’s lives every time you approached those loud, dirty halls, knowing that if suddenly you became a target, no-one would help you. As noted by Nordstrom and Robben, “the front lines are volatile and inchoate, with violence being constructed, negotiated, reshaped, and resolved as perpetrators and victims try to define and control the world they find themselves in” (Nordsrom, et al., 1995 p. 8). The long term exposure and conditioning from these settings has been credited as the initial trauma that ultimately led to my Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Likewise, this experience of physical commitment holds consequences for the researcher.

In order to deter attacks while in the field, our team wore T-shirts which advertised our role as aid workers. Throughout my stay, however, there was evidence that murderers target anyone who challenges the status quo. The United Nations has been vocal on the recent trend of murders of public prosecutors and the increasing vulnerability of human rights defenders, 250 reported human rights defenders were victims of attacks and eight had been killed in 2010 alone (UN News Centre, 2011). In late 2010, Amelia, a sociologist from Huehuetenango was abducted and murdered. Clearly the thin shield of cotton t-shirts would not stop a bullet. While I was visiting the red-light districts, I was subjected to verbal and physical harassment as well as gang intimidation. The gang members were a constant dangerous presence in these areas, but never more dangerous than when they were under the influence of substances, alcohol or drugs. I quickly learned to avoid eye contact, always wear clothing to cover my skin, nothing form fitting or flattering and using hats in order to always appear unattractive and aloof. As Baird described in his article, “Mythological Dilemmas: Researching Violent Young Men in Medellin, Colombia” fear can rob confidence and replaced it with insecurity (2009 pp. 74-75). Yet in order to be safe, it was important to always feel very unsafe so that comparative safety came at quite a high psychological price, living with a sustained sense of insecurity. Living and working in Guatemala City, with one of the highest homicide rates in urban Latin America (O’Neil, et al., 2011 p. 11) in that environment of violence and fear was emotionally taxing to say the least. Whenever, I began to relax or feel comfortable, something awful would happen to remind us that we were never safe.

*April 13<sup>th</sup>, Erika (sex worker, student of English) called to explain that she had been unable to attend my class because she had been badly beaten by a client on the Line. April 14<sup>th</sup>, Marlana’s (a sex worker) eighteen year old son has been murdered by the gangs for refusing to pay extortion for his moped taxi. April 15<sup>th</sup>, on my usual route home the taxi driver asks us to lock our doors because we are passing “a very dangerous zone”.<sup>3</sup> April 16<sup>th</sup>, in class today I noticed that Kristy’s (sex worker, student of English) split cheek is healing and her eye is less blackened. April 19<sup>th</sup>, the news reported a woman has been murdered by a tattooed thirteen year old boy for 100Q, roughly 13\$USD and there is heightened fear among the women that the value of a woman’s life is so little. (Extracts from Field Notes April 2010)*

The constant bombardment of violence, insecurity and fear resulted in an intense restriction of movement and a tremendous conditioning affect on my psyche. This affect is what Nordstrom and Robben call existential shock (1995 p. 13).

## Existential Shock

In their book, *Fieldwork Under Fire*, Nordstrom and Robben identify an experience of bewilderment on seeing violence for the first time which they call existential shock (1995 p. 13).

*It is a disorientation about the boundaries between life and death, which appear erratic rather than discrete. It is the paradoxical awareness that human lives can be constituted as much around their destruction as around their reconstruction and that violence becomes a practice of negating the reason of existence of others and accentuating the survival of oneself. It is this confrontation of the*

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<sup>3</sup> “una zona muy peligroso”

*ethnographer's own sense of being with lives constructed on haphazard grounds that provokes the bewilderment and sense of alienation experienced by most of us. Existential shock is highly personal and context-specific research phenomenon. (Nordstrom, et al., 1995 p. 13)*

Nordstrom and Robben describe participant observation in violence contexts as seemingly impossible to conduct with relative detachment (Nordstrom, et al., 1995 p. 13). This shock is reportedly common among researchers of violence and can be an intensely isolating experience. In order to illustrate researcher shock amidst research participants' apparent blasé attitudes toward violence I use the metaphor of frog in boiling water syndrome. If a frog is dropped into a pot of boiling water, it will try to leap out to save its own life, however, if a frog is put into a pot of tepid water and the heat is slowly turned up, then frog's legs will be served for dinner. The violence is the boiling water in this metaphor. Like the first frog, the researcher's existential shock is the reaction to a sudden immersion into a life threatening situation. The second frog, however, as the research participants, has a history of acclimation in a lifetime of increasing violence. Research participants have established tolerance levels and coping strategies, while the researcher is adjusting to extreme circumstances in the immediate here and now. Unlike the first frog, however, many of us, myself included do not leap out of the boiling water; I did not leave Guatemala or settle for safer research. I stayed and unwittingly committed to transformation in the extreme environment. This adjustment became a seemingly unending set of questions and self criticism of my own fears and whether my reactions to the violence were the appropriate ones in comparison to local reactions.

Such a transformation in the researcher's psyche can have profound consequences "for the extremes that people's existential disorientation may reach" (Nordstrom, et al., 1995 p. 3). I remember abnormal intrusive thoughts in relation to the danger. Once on a long bus ride, we passed an accident where a bus hit a truck in a horrific fiery collision, and I remember feeling every bone in my spine from my tailbone to my neck. The fragility of my body and the ease with which life was destroyed in Guatemala was a grim actuality to normalize. Moreover, I found that writing field notes at the end of the day became an increasingly daunting task. The struggle of continuing participant observation in violent contexts day after day was draining. After working for the organization, conducting interviews and then returning home alone, the thought of re-living the day's experience by writing about it was often unbearable. I could take notes during the day, but at night, I needed to turn off the violence. I had to find some small way to escape, in order to be able to get up the next day and do it all over again.

Never was the inability to process the violence more severe than when one of my research participants was killed. On February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010, Sandra was strangled to death with a power cord in her room on the Line. On March 10<sup>th</sup> 2010, Doña Sessi was shot five times as she was closing the door to her room to leave work for the night. She bled to death in the dirt. These murders were not distant unknown people, these were women I was getting to know, and had shared laughs with.

*Guate, particularly the last six months was an emotional struggle like I've never had to deal with before. I had to handle an incredible amount of loss in a very short period of time. Every time another one died, we were again struck with this enormous loss, having not yet recovered from the previous loss. Losing Sandra was so rough, but Doña Sesi hit me so very hard. And you can't imagine what it all feels like until you are obliterated with a bottle of tequila on your closet floor, rocking, sobbing into a phone to your sister how you "couldn't save her". I had a number of cracking points I'm not too proud of, and I am nowhere near healed and passed it all. But how could it be any other way? (Email to Supervisors, June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010).*

I felt a personal connection with these women, I identified with their struggle. As a social activist, I believe that the purpose of my research is to have a positive impact on the participants (also see Manz, 2008 p. 158). An extension of this belief was that, on some level, I felt responsible for the participants' well being. For me, failing to keep them safe culminated into an existential breaking point. I felt that while I was in Guatemala, I was broken a number of times, but always had to tape and glue myself back together, get up in the morning and go out to do it all again continuing with the work. I do not consider these breaking points a weakness because I remained in that toxic environment determined to continue with the work and enduring this existential transformation alone. My colleagues and research participants were unable to understand my shock having developed resilient coping mechanisms during their history of lived violent experiences. Moreover, given the violent reputation of Guatemala City, researchers, tourists, and activists avoid Guatemala City as the mortal risks are too high (O'Neil, et al., 2011). This compounded isolation, or double-distance, can easily occur when undertaking fieldwork in extreme environments, so that I was unable to find another long-term foreign researcher to share such concerns.

*...but for the amount of life threatening situations I've seen here, and the oppressive nature of the fear I've been living under in order to survive Guate has made everything so much more difficult than I had expected when I designed the project back in Scotland. Even if I could go back in time, and explain it to myself, I don't know if I'd believe me. I'm not a fearful person and I like to charge into situations others would hesitate, but I've had to do a lot more hiding here than I would have liked. Grappling with all that while feeling guilty that unlike my compañeras, I did not grow up here, and someday I am going to leave them here as I return to my safe university. This has been infinitely more difficult than I expected. (Email to Supervisors, June 3<sup>d</sup> 2010).*

As you can see from the quotation I was emotionally separated from my colleagues though difference of experience and a guilt that I was a privileged researcher (Chiseri-Strater, 1996 p. 116) only sharing their struggles for a year. In Guatemala I was more critical of my abilities as a researcher than in any of the other ethnographies I conducted, while the layers of fear mounted. As I compared my level of fear and insecurity with those expressed by my research participants and viewed myself with mounting denigration. While my research participants employed coping tactics of fatalism and victim blaming, I remained objectively critical of these techniques. Victim blaming served both to justify senseless acts of violence and to distinguish the respondent from the possibility of the same fate. Blame acts as a distancing factor, by blaming the victim for not paying their debts, not listening to advice, for simply “not thinking”<sup>4</sup> which helped to establish the victim as ‘other’. Respondents also applied fatalism in order to cope with overwhelming insecurity. Many expressed remorse at an inability to change their circumstances, but found a comfort in God, “Dios me cuida” (God watches over me) or the idea that while in their situations they were doomed to suffer that “por lo menos” (at least) they could “sacar mis hijos adelante” (take their children forward) to give their children a life they could not live with education and opportunity. That they would suffer was permissible so long as their children would not. Being a childless atheist I remained objectively critical of fatalism as a coping mechanism. Isolated from local strategies to cope with violence and insecurity worsened my emotional trauma from those surroundings.

## **Guilt and Isolation**

The task of the ethnographer is to access and thereby understand the world of the insider yet, “the emotional response of feeling as if one is an outsider is a constant burden for researchers who operate in completely unfamiliar cultural realms and where points of physical and emotional exit from the researched world seem blurred, oscillating and fleeting” (Piacentini 2009:74-98). Like many researchers, at times I struggled with the “paradox of intimacy” (Mitchell 1991 cited in Lee 1995:25). While I do feel that I became an accepted member of the community, I was aware my position in their social world was always to some extent an outsider, in that I was not Guatemalan, nor was I a sex worker. Not only did my role as an outsider result in an isolation from the social coping mechanisms in terms of the violence, but it also carried with it a multifarious web of guilt. I felt guilty for my reactions to the violence and my struggle with these contexts which had been long accepted by the participants, left me continuously questioning the validity of my reactions. What right had I to struggle with it when they had been enduring violence for their entire lives? I tried to take my queues from them; when they showed fear, I knew my fear was more than justified. Yet guilt continued to infect my thoughts with the certainty that while I was deeply invested in the well-being of the research participants, I was somehow only a tourist to their troubles (Villenas, 1996). Knowing that one day I would abandon them in the violence while I pursued a career in a safer environment was perhaps the most crippling guilt to be faced with (Punch, 2012). For this reason I felt unable to discuss my fear and insecurity with my Guatemalan colleagues. My need to protect my family and friends meant that I could rarely discuss these issues with them. Like many local women the danger of the city restricted my movement outside of work and home, and I was unable to find an outlet for my insecurity and was emotionally isolated in my attempts to cope with these circumstances. Ethnographic fieldwork can be so intense that you are never actually off-duty (Punch 2012:90). Every morning, I would wake up an hour or more early so that I had some time to gather my courage using music therapy to face the day again. On the weekends, I often caught a bus to Antigua to get some supplies, such as chocolate soy milk, giant bags of Doritos, and tampons I

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<sup>4</sup> (Interview Victoria, 28/06/2010, Sex Worker, 30years old, Trafficked at 15 years from Nicaragua.) “Porque son mujeres que, como lo voy a repetir, no le importa de ella misma, no pagan lo que deben, o andan con gente no agradable, como puedo decir, mareros, como narcos, como, como un sicario, son persona no tocan el ama, y por eso es que las matan, va? Ellas no piensan, porque ellas no hagan al consejo de las demás mujeres que se los damos, y porque uno dicen, ‘paga lo que debes, paga lo que debes’ y ellas dicen ‘no, no,... lo voy a pagar cuando yo quiere, si son mujeres que le verle, que no se quieren a sí misma, verdad, porque si yo se que van a ... dan si yo me quiero yo misma, voy a pagar lo...y aparte de eso, porque uno piensan en mujeres que aman, las matan va,(...) hay mujeres que no piensan, positivamente.”

was unable to find in the capital. Antigua was like an island of security and western tourism. Armed private security forces everywhere maintain a relative security from the violence found elsewhere in Guatemala. The population in Antigua was either wealthy locals or transient tourists and did not provide an opportunity for building a long-term quality support network. At first, my trips to Antigua helped me to achieve my escape strategy, but later on the affluence and superficial quality of life there left me more empty and isolated in coping with the violent struggles in the Capital. Without an outlet for the “everydayness of war” and “never-ending stream of worries” (Nordstrom, et al., 1995 p. 3) my strategy of escape seemed my only way to cope. A researcher must be resourceful in order to cope with the pressures of field work which according to Punch can erode enthusiasm resulting in a “lack of motivation” (2012 p. 90). Personal reactions and strategies of coping with the violence are an important part of research in violent contexts. Yet little social direction exists on “how to cope and survive in violent situations” (Nordstrom, et al., 1995 p. 3).

In the field, the emotional effects of prolonged ethnographic field work can be an essential source of insight (Punch, 2012 p. 92; Roberts, 2001 p. 154). My first reaction to the violent context was horror at the lived experiences of my research participants. As an astute participant observer, I absorbed as much of my surroundings as I could, but as time went on, I found myself needing to escape more and more. The more than one hundred interviews I conducted around Guatemala while confronted with mounting tragedy attests to my strength, endurance, and commitment to the research. The prolonged exposure to “such life threatening violence demonstrates the paralysis as well as the creativity of people coping under duress, a duress for which few are prepared” (Nordstrom, et al., 1995 p. 3). For these reasons I assert that emotions are a part of the ethnographic methodological data gathering process. Guilt became my way of maintaining a continuous ethical inner-dialogue on my impact on the research. As mentioned, fear became a useful tool to ward off insecurity. The emotion of loss and my subsequent coping strategies can become useful tools with which to compare and contrast the coping strategies of research participants. Finally, these emotions represent empathy which is a key part of constructing valid data, through an in-depth understanding of the participants’ lived experience. Yet all of these experiences and resulting emotions had changed me significantly, and when I left the field, I was unprepared for how those changes would clash with who I was before I had undertaken such a dramatic transformation.

## Post Field Work Transition

When I left the field I could not turn-off my emotional adaptation to Guatemala. Upon returning to the UK, I was greeted with a bombardment of expectations and pressures while simultaneously it seemed impossible to reconnect with my old life. Because the trauma occurred a continent away, people appeared uninterested in the experience of the ethnography or its effects on me, yet it appeared as if everyone had their own expectations of me. Since little had changed among my friends and colleagues, there were assumptions that little had changed with me. It was the pressure to be happy, that I found particularly daunting.

*It is attitudes like that, the constant pressure to “suck it up and deal” or to be happy that adds pressure to an already emotionally taxed state. Everyday people ask, “So, are you happy to be back in Scotland?” “So, I bet you’re happy to be out of Guatemala?” When in actuality, you are not happy to have left your Guatemalan friends behind, left others to struggle without you, left your life behind. (Email to Supervisors, 10/8/10)*

Moreover, routine is especially important in the search for a feeling of normalcy, but when I returned consistency eluded me. Issues with mould in my flat sent me to hospital with respiratory issues and when construction repair work began I was living out of a Bed & Breakfast. The feelings of reverse culture shock were intensified because I was not returning to my own familiar Floridian culture, but to the British culture which exacerbated feelings of alienation, abnormality and foreignness.

*So, the upheaval I’ve come back to in the apartment has turned an already emotional difficult situation into a frantic and frustrating fruitless search for the familiar, by the second two weeks I was barely maintaining the day to day, emotional turmoil just beneath the surface, panic to find some feeling of normalcy, and still, the questions of happiness kept coming. So, in addition to this emotional pressure to be happy, you find that you’re struggling to grasp a routine amidst the chaos. (Email to Supervisors, 10/8/10)*

At this stage of my return the post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms were surfacing. I felt the conflicting need coupled with fear to return to Guatemala where the symptoms of PTSD would be appropriate. Specifically, survivor’s guilt resulted in increased anxiety.

*Leaving Guate was hard, leaving my girls behind felt like abandoning them. I've been here for a few weeks and at times I'm still uncomfortable, as everything seems fake, the picturesque streets, the accents, and I miss my girls in Guate, my life and my struggle... other times the thought of going back fills me with fear and I'm happy simply to have made it out alive (literally)... and life here seems so easy, and yet I miss the important and strong connections I've left behind, being a part of something bigger, the struggle for positive change... So as you can see, it's an emotional rollercoaster... (Email to Supervisors, 10/8/10)*

I felt it incredibly difficult to phone my colleagues in Guatemala at the organization I worked with because of a mixture of survivor's guilt and my own avoidance strategy for fear of reliving my connection with Guatemala that sparked involuntary feelings of panic, but mostly I was afraid to hear if someone had been murdered while I'd been safe in Scotland that would worsen my guilt. When I tried to reach out and talk about my experiences with my friends and family, they would become uncomfortable and would close the subject by saying that they are there for me whenever I needed to talk, or we could get a coffee sometime, always putting off the discussion and never being available. This was increasingly frustrating. I had the appearance of a support system without actually experiencing support. Aloud people could feel good about their offer to listen, but the insincerity of the offer left me perpetually isolated.

*Everyone wants you to be happy and keep it together and you are still dealing with this immense loss. Everyone offers to help, to listen, but no one actually wants to listen because no one has time for that amount of hell. Opening the flood gates to all that is more than a simple 20min coffee break. As a result, dealing with all of this loss alone in the midst of a communal block lack-of-interest in the suffering you left behind but still carry with you is so isolating. (Email to Supervisors 10/8/10 sent 15:49)*

Eventually, the pressure to be happy and the insincerity of concern led me to withdrawal from social interactions<sup>5</sup>. In social situations people expected me to be who I was before I had gone to Guatemala, fun, funny, easy to talk to and light hearted, and when I could not be that person, I felt their disappointment and discomfort. So I began to avoid social situations and for six months after my return I struggled with my inability to adjust, feelings of panic, isolation, seasonal depression amidst other people's expectations of normalcy and happiness. I became conditioned not to speak about my experiences so as to not make others uncomfortable and the isolation of that experience worsened my symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Finally, I applied for a leave of absence and returned home to Florida, where at long last, I began my process of recovery.

## Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome

Six months after my return from the field, I could not understand why I was having such a hard time coping with my new reality. Upon a suggestion from my sister and a good friend from a previous ethnography, I sought counseling through the university, where a qualified professional counselor confirmed that I was experiencing Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as defined by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980 is the re-experiencing of a traumatic event such as natural disasters, accidents, and wartime experiences (Perkonig, et al., 2000 p. 47; Macfarlane, et al., 1994 p. 715). According to Kinchin, in order for a diagnosis to be made five criteria must be met:

1.	The person must have witnessed or experienced a serious threat (real or perceived) to his life or physical well-being.
2.	The person must re-experience the event, or part of the event, in some form.
3.	The person must persistently avoid situations associated with the trauma, or experience a numbing of general responsiveness.
4.	The person must experience persistent symptoms of increased arousal or 'over-awareness'.
5.	Symptoms must have lasted at least a month.

<sup>5</sup> This may sound harsh on those around me who care about me, but I feel it is important to preserve the severity of the feelings of isolation amidst the appearance of support. This is not to say that those around me are uncaring. The insincerity stemmed primarily from a lack of awareness and inability to understand the continuation of the trauma when removed from a traumatic environment. Since I had returned safely from danger, it was difficult to comprehend a need for concern.

Table 1: (Kinchin, 1994 pp. 50-51)

Many ethnographic research projects in dangerous contexts about distressing topics qualify for the first category. Additionally, ethnographic researchers may be susceptible to "Secondary Trauma" which is the trauma experienced by the researcher from the research topic in which interviews consist of trauma survivors recounting horrifying, terrifying and shocking traumatic memories (Jenkins & Baird, 2002 p. 423) or the telling of crimes committed which have generated suffering, recounting their memories of generating trauma. According to Kinchin, depression also often accompanies PTSD (1994 p.119). Future field workers should be made aware of the different levels of trauma that ethnographic researchers can be susceptible to and how to identify those levels in their own research.

It is also important to understand the symptoms of this trauma and how they can affect researchers. The second category, is what Kinchin calls "intrusive" because the symptoms tend to invade daily life as, "recurrent and distressing recollections; flashbacks, thoughts, nightmares, dreams" and some develop, "phobias about specific daily routines, events or objects" and "feelings of guilt for having survived" (Kinchin, 1994 p. 113-114; also see van der Kolk 1987 p. 69). In my case, there was both an everydayness of these feelings, but they intensified when I was exposed to stimulus that triggered my symptoms. I began to identify triggers such as violent images in films or the news, even my own field notes took on the "role of the stressor" (Mcfarlane, et al., 1994 p. 722; also see Kinchin, 1994 p. 79). I would suddenly have feelings of panic, usually later followed by more guilt. I had violent nightmares and restless sleep. I felt disconnected from the peacefulness of my surroundings and became uncomfortable around people. These triggers evoked the physical symptoms of PTSD represented in category four which can include, "high levels of arousal and anxiety, information processing disorder, dissociation or avoidance" (Mcfarlane, et al., 1994 p. 722) as well as the "psychological symptoms, anxiety, agoraphobia, tension, social withdrawal, aggressive outbursts, poor concentration, panic attacks, obsessions, depression" (Kinchin, 1994 p. 113). In my case, I physically felt that my computer with my data was a coiled rattle snake in the corner of the room ready to bite and poison me with my own memories if I opened the interview files. I felt plagued by "intrusive emotionally-laden thoughts" which were "distressing and unwanted" (Mcfarlane, et al., 1994 p. 723). These issues were exacerbated by the deep seeded frustration from not being understood (Mcfarlane, et al., 1994 p.724).

*Now given these realities, in hindsight, a week off from work may not have been enough, (truly a year seems more appropriate, though admittedly not very practical). Forcing myself back into the research has been a struggle in itself. I am struggling to return to the research, to go back into it all, to reopen what I am, each day, so successfully hiding away in order to find the happiness everyone's expecting. Especially, in light of the chaotic life I'm working to get back in order. This may sound familiar, as it was a similar problem I had in Guate, but I am forcing it as best I can. I realize I'm not the only ethnographer who deals with this amount of emotional turmoil, but I thought you should be aware of what's happening with your research student because I'm getting the sense that you both feel a bit in the dark about everything. I hope after this, you can appreciate what it is like to be me today. In light of the fear & loss I carry with me from Guate in the face of the unfamiliar realities of Scottish culture, the upheaval of my home-life, and the constant pressure to be happy, be fine, just get used to it already because you should be used to it by now (laden with condescension). (Email to Supervisors, 10/8/10)*

In terms of category three, I involuntarily avoided my triggers by leaving my home less and less, while feelings of estrangement and social isolation (van der Kolk, 1987 p. 3) lead to an almost agoraphobia which was probably the result of conditioning from Guatemala where the streets represented heightened danger. As I mentioned, I often wanted to return to the violence where these feeling would make sense. When I returned from Guatemala, I felt incapable of conducting data analysis and avoided the research "through various forms of busywork, to feelings of depersonalization" struggling with unrelenting "fears surrounding images of illness, injury, and death" (Lee 1995 p. 14). I developed avoidance methods that seemed to me largely involuntary. I avoided conducting data analysis which included thoughts or feelings associated with my experiences in Guatemala (Kinchin, 1994 pp. 113-114). I describe these reactions as involuntarily because I am an active person, so if I was not working on my dissertation, I was constantly finding a chore that needed done, cleaning the house, doing every piece of laundry, arranging and rearranging things until I would come to the end of the day and not know how I had gotten to the end of the day. Although, every day was different, on the days where I forced myself to work, I often buried myself in advocacy and activism work. I created power points and presentations illustrating my findings while in Guatemala which became the only forums I felt where I could express the horror of Guatemala and fulfill my promise to my research participants that I would raise awareness about the situation in Guatemala. In terms of advocacy, I provided expert testimony on a trafficking case involving a Guatemalan victim trafficked to the USA. Focusing on these tasks helped me to avoid transcribing my interview data, while easing my guilt for abandoning my research participants.

## Emotional Stigma

The most complicating factor in my experience with PTSD was the general ignorance surrounding the condition (Kinchin, 1994 p. 78). There are a number of ethnographers who research distressing topics in violent contexts, yet secondary trauma and PTSD are rarely, if ever discussed or publicized so there is little awareness that such difficulties exist in research. This lack of recognition of emotional trauma in research contributes to a personal/professional divide in which emotions are personal, research is professional and their place is ambiguous in research. Subsequently, researchers suffering these conditions do so in silence giving rise to an assumption that these emotional issues are absent from research. This assumption was represented by both from my own inability to understand and communicate my situation with my supervisors and my supervisors' inability to understand and adequately anticipate difficulties faced. This overall lack of awareness resulted in a six months delay in the diagnosis of PTSD, thereby prolonging recovery. During those six months with mounting symptoms the variety of the intrusive symptoms increasingly affected my productivity and I was losing valuable time, while remaining responsible to my supervisors who were struggling to understand my aversion to the work. Reactions ranged at hints to procrastination to suggestions that I had "gone native" (Hume and Mulcock, 2004 p. 51) in what became a mismatch of expectations and intentions. Such a label implies an extreme lack of objectivity which could invalidate a research project. Our combined lack of knowledge about the condition meant my own self doubt and self criticisms were confirmed by supervisors. Those reactions from my supervisors were interpreted by me as active stigmatization of emotions that were a direct result of the ethnographic research. "Going native" was a baseless suggestion, on the contrary, "going native" would have eased my intense reaction to the violence, had I been able to adopt local coping strategies. It was my objective criticism of local victim blaming tactics and fatalistic acceptance that increased my vulnerability to emotional trauma from the violence. I was fighting to understand what was happening to me while wrestling to explain and justify the experience to others. This complicated lack of understanding resulted in my supervisors' fear that the depth and rawness of my emotions threatened to derail the PhD entirely. That fear coupled with my unexplainable unproductiveness developed into mistrust and discord. Violent contexts and distressing subjects could not be sufficient explanations since numerous other researchers have conducted similar research without the appearance of these issues. Moreover, how could my behavior remain unproductive since I had been safely in the UK for almost half a year? I, myself, could not understand why I continued to feel so intensely about the experience after time had passed. My own equation of emotional trauma with weakness meant that I stigmatized my own emotions which made them difficult to communicate to my supervisors. As mentioned, very little emotional guidance exists for ethnographers, PhD students or supervisors, and this lack of awareness even among experienced ethnographers can have harmful consequences.

The most problematic issue was the overall ignorance of the condition. PTSD is treatable, and more so if caught early. The longer the PTSD went untreated the more embedded the experience of trauma became which in turn prolonged recovery. I sought professional help well after I had lost the capacity to modulate anxiety (van de Kolk, 1987 p. 7) or handle social everyday situations. Unfortunately, I still struggle with the triggers and symptoms and probably will for the rest of my life, but I am back in control of my own emotions, and nearing completion of the PhD project, having invested in the long term solution,

*The long-term solution is to 'talk it out', and become so at ease with discussing the trauma that the chemical messages of panic are no longer triggered. This is a job for an expert. Trauma counselors, psychiatrists and psychologists are all trained to help victims control these triggers. It is often a slow process but it is the long-term treatment to cure PTSD. (Kinchin, 1994 p. 115)*

While some psychiatrists, like Summerfield, question the usefulness of the PTSD diagnosis since the underlying question in PTSD is, "how much or what kind of adversity a person can face and still be 'normal'; what is reasonable risk" (Summerfield, 2001 p. 96). Nonetheless, I found the diagnosis incredibly beneficial. The diagnosis turned my symptoms into something I could understand, work through and communicate to my supervisors. After the syndrome was identified I learned about the long term effects on people who suffer PTSD, which include physical changes in neurotransmitters, hormones and the immune system, which make integrating back into society a monumentally daunting task (Moorhead, 2006 p. 216). I began to realize why, when I looked in the mirror, I did not recognize the person looking back at me. These actual neurological changes in cases of PTSD mean that I am not the same person I was when I embarked on the ethnography and never will be again. Trying to return to being that person again was an unrealistic expectation and that this is the person I am now, with a richer understanding of post-conflict societies.

## Summary

Like Punch, this article argues that emotions such as guilt, apprehension, fears and worries are legitimate, common and even useful experiences of fieldwork (Punch, 2012). Yet these emotions, specifically trauma related emotions, are still often considered very much in the private and personal spheres and not a part of the professional sphere of objective research. Along with Punch (2010), Hume (2007), Hume, et al., (2004), I argue that emotions are more than a by-product of ethnography but an integral part of the data gathering process. Yet, awareness about the prevalence of emotional trauma in research is inadequate. It is crucial to examine the isolating consequences of coping strategies within the insider/outsider perspectives which constrain emotional growth. Through a reflexive analysis of my research experience I have shed light on how PTSD can be the result of field work with vulnerable groups in violent contexts while revealing how transparency is expected in overall methods; except for emotions. My experience with the personal/professional divide exposed lingering undefined areas of emotions in ethnography which may be interpreted as emotional stigmatization. I disagree that ethnographers should hide the emotional consequences of research in favour of appearing more academic. Empathy for researchers is hard to find, neither from ethnographic or non-ethnographic researchers, nor from people outside or inside your ethnography. Outsiders can rarely relate to the day to day ethnographic experiences, and insiders are often too de-sensitized to those same circumstances. There is very little opportunity to find emotional closure at the end of the day. Furthermore, there is added pressure from an academic requirement to produce in a scientifically objective manor while all your senses and emotions are running on over-drive.

Ultimately, this article provided a reflexive examination of my ethnographic experience both in the field and post-fieldwork transition highlighting an acute need for recognition and awareness to create better guidance and support for future ethnographers. I have met numerous ethnographers conducting research, all with very different personalities and different strategies for acclimation. Some ethnographers maintain there was nothing emotionally difficult or dangerous to contend with and hold that emotions only reveal weakness. Some people are very private; others argue that emotions cloud the research. Moreover, people's reactions to this paper have been mixed. A number of field workers who reviewed this article, however, identified strongly with my situation and related some of their own similar experiences, transformations and recoveries from traumas. One researcher was described as becoming physically ill in the field in the form of regular vomiting as a consequence of her existential shock. An activist described her exit from the field being plagued by graphic nightmares of her own murder which she had been unable to explain since those nightmares were not present during her time in the field. Other ethnographers and activists recognised the symptoms of trauma in their own post-field work transitions but had been unable to articulate them prior to their review of this article. The majority of ethnographic reviewers of this article described a different variation of symptoms yet enthusiastically agreed about the compounding problem of ignorance and isolating consequences of the conditions. A researcher described struggling with intense anger over the lack of support for her situation of emotional trauma post-field work and asked why my article seemed to lack that antagonism. My response was that I had wrestled with infuriating frustration but had been advised to edit out the anger because my writing seemed accusatory. Despite that, I was repeatedly warned about the level of honesty in my writing which would expose me to intense criticism from those equating emotional trauma to weakness and failed research. Yet, reflecting on where I was and how have things changed uncovered my transformation as a researcher and as a person. I recognize that I am responsible for my own well being, however, the personal/professional divide in research, the lack of information, guidance and support surrounding emotional trauma in research and the mismatch of expectations and intentions complicate an already intense situation for researchers. These complications mean that without a change in the researcher community surrounding these issues it is unrealistic to expect supervisors to have all the answers when I myself did not. Overall, I let go a lot of my frustration and anger at the lack of awareness surrounding these issues by resolving to publish this article in the hopes that my openness will raise awareness to foster change in perceptions on emotional trauma in research so as to perhaps prevent similar difficulties surrounding the post-field work experience.

I found that ignoring or hiding the emotions have a negative effect on the research and the researcher. My attempts to ignore and hide my PTSD symptoms coupled with the lack of awareness about the syndrome resulted in my delayed recovery. My writing of this article has been an intensely revealing process. The similar accounts and enthusiasm from other researchers for this article confirmed the need for increased awareness of emotional trauma in research. This article was written so as to delineate the risks of the PTSD and secondary trauma in ethnographic research, outline the symptoms of the condition in order to facilitate their identification in further researchers, thereby raising awareness about the emotional consequences of research and revealing how essential it is that awareness be included in the training of future researchers.

Post Script Recommendations for future researchers: Set up professional counseling well in advance of embarking on fieldwork. Social networks are important in the field, but if researchers find themselves, like I did, in a situation where that creating social networks is not possible, try to be less self-critical of personal coping mechanisms for adaptation to difficult even dangerous situations. Most importantly, ethnographers should become aware of the symptoms of emotional trauma as possible common consequence of ethnography. Early recognition is important for recovery. Supervisors and fellow ethnographer-colleagues could become proactive in recognizing symptoms and recommending support.

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