

Research as Gendered Intervention: Feminist Research Ethics and the Self in the Research Encounter

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Resumen

En este artículo exploro las maneras en que un 'yo' –en tanto investigadora, académica y feminista– ha sido constituido a través de mis prácticas de investigación, y considero las formas en que este 'yo' es/está disciplinado: ¿cuáles son las dimensiones de silenciamiento en torno a la constitución de mi 'yo' y cómo estos silencios revelan la importancia de dar cuenta de sí en clave reflexiva, en el marco de una ética feminista de la investigación? Propongo que mi individualidad es tejida a través de mis prácticas de investigación, mientras al mismo tiempo doy cuenta de las opciones que tomo y explico cómo y por qué llegué a las decisiones que tomé durante el proceso de investigación. Estoy implicada en, y soy producida por, mis prácticas académicas. Considero que la ganancia política de reflexionar sobre la investigación como una intervención 'con género' es mostrar la ilusión de certeza, completud y estabilidad como la quimera que es. Este pequeño acto de resistencia está al servicio de la transformación de la academia en un espacio de humildad, incertidumbre y esperanza. No hay mucha esperanza cuando todas las preguntas han sido contestadas y todas las posibilidades exhaustas. Identificar las prácticas performativas a través de las que soy constituida y explorar dichas prácticas por medio de una aproximación narrativa a mi 'yo', contribuye a una visión del mundo social como no fijo o cerrado sino en proceso de devenir, donde las posibilidades están abiertas.

Palabras clave: 'yo', investigación, género, narrativa, posibilidades.

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Abstract

In this essay, I explore the ways in which an 'I' – as a researcher, as an academic, as a feminist – have been constituted through my research practices, and consider also the ways in which this 'I' is disciplined: what are the dimensions of silence around the constitution of my self and how do these silences reveal the significance of making such reflective accounts, within a feminist research ethic? I propose that my self-hood is woven through my research practices, as I account for the choices that I make and explain how and why I came to the decisions that I did during the conduct of research. I am implicated in, and produced through, my research practices. I think that the political purchase of elaborating on research as a gendered intervention is to show the illusion of certainty, of wholeness and stability, for the chimera that it is. This small act of resistance is in service of the transformation of the academy into a space of humility, uncertainty, and hope. There is little hope to be found when all questions have been answered and all possibilities exhausted. Identifying the performative practices through which I am constituted and exploring these practices as a narrative account of my self contributes to a vision of the social world that is not fixed and closed, but in the process of becoming, where possibility is very much alive.

Keywords: 'I', research, gender, narrative, possibilities.

Prologue: I have recently returned to my normal duties, after a nourishing, nurturing, magnificent six-month sabbatical. I have struggled to carve out the time – in between meetings with colleagues, responding to the demands of senior management, dealing with complaints from students, in my capacity as Deputy Head of School – to re-engage with this paper, which has travelled with me from Sydney to London and back again, quietly wondering when its time will come. This is part of the story: the self I account for in the pages that follow are in tension with the self who cannot find time to make this account. And this is part of the context: where are the silences in the selves we admit to, and why do we validate some selves and not others? Today, I have the time to write. Today, I can disconnect from colleagues, managers, students and reconnect with my self and other kinds of others. Today, this is my story.

Research is demanding. It is time-consuming, painstaking, fear-inducing, sometimes tedious, and always intense. I began thinking about the themes of this paper as I brought to conclusion a major research project, a project that demanded a lot of me as both a scholar and a person. It was the first major funded project I had undertaken since my doctoral research, and the first of my research ventures to involve 'field research' (more on that below). I experienced a number of challenges in its execution, experiences which led me to reflect on the practice of research as a

sequence or collection of performative acts and the imbrication of my self (my inescapably gendered self) in my research practice. In the process of deliberating, or reflecting upon, the ways in which an 'I' – as a researcher, as an academic, as a feminist – have been constituted through my research practices, I began to consider also the ways in which this 'I' is disciplined: what are the dimensions of silence around the constitution of my self and how do these silences reveal the significance of making such reflective accounts, within a feminist research ethic? I am guided by Naeem Inayatullah's refusal to 'ontologize' myself (my *self*); I do not make these claims on behalf of an essential, stable 'I', nor do I think that 'I' am the most interesting feature of the social world that I both encounter and inhabit. But I do think that 'exposure and disclosure of the self/selves, rather than locating some idiosyncratic "n of 1" or some *sui generis* entity, instead uncovers events, histories, cultures, and worlds' (Inayatullah 2011, 8). The world I uncover here are the worlds of the academy in late modernity, but I will abandon this thought for the moment and begin instead by telling a story or two.

The first of these stories begins, sort of, with my move from the UK to Australia, and then, within a year or two of that happening, with the election of Australia to a two-year term of office on the UN Security Council. I have worked with UN documents, particularly Security Council resolutions, often throughout my career; I find them endlessly fascinating. I love the form and cadence of the resolutions, the recitation of heritage and dues in the Preamble, and the textured layers of meaning in the operative paragraphs, made all the richer by knowing that every single word in every single resolution is negotiated and agreed upon by the present members of the Council. I love that sometimes this negotiation happens at speed, and really interesting bits of language sneak through. I love that academics fight constantly about the status of SC resolutions in international law; there's general agreement that resolutions of the Council acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter are binding but we continue to debate whether resolutions are generally binding on member states or simply impose specific obligations upon those states on a case-by-case basis. The question of legal standing, and the argumentation presented by both sides, tends to hinge on language, which is perhaps why I find the resolutions and the field of debates so engaging.

I love Security Council resolutions and much of my research involves engaging with such documents, particularly those produced under the auspices of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. I am also fascinated by the politics of the Council, by the significance of the five permanent members to the institutional politics of the UN more broadly and by the rotation of the ten elected members and related shifts in priority and focus of the Council from month to month as the presidency too rotates among the membership. With Australia occupying one of the E-10 seats for two years, my new Australian colleagues and I made many efforts to engage the government and advocate for a strong and consistent commitment to championing the Women, Peace and Security agenda at the UN for the duration of the term of office. I wrote letters (never more than a page), I made phone calls

(sometimes, but not often, to the right people at the right time) and I attended a large number of consultations with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) throughout the two years.

I would get up in the morning, early, to catch a flight down to Canberra for these consultations. I would travel to the airport in a taxi, and I would cross the Sydney Harbour Bridge feeling somewhat smugly accomplished at having been invited to participate in the day's meetings, trying to ignore the gritty-eyed tiredness and generalized sense of imposture. I would make my way to the DFAT building and wait in the foyer to be escorted through to the meeting room; I would shake hands with the other participants and respond, when asked my name, 'I'm Laura Shepherd. I'm an academic', by way of explanation for my presence. I said it all in one breath, as though the second naming was as essential as the first. I invoked the academy as a protection, as a justification, to benefit from its associations. 'I'm an academic', I said. I did not say, 'I'm an expert', 'I'm a thinker of profound and important thoughts', 'I belong'. These things I left unsaid, I let my simple introduction do the work for me: 'I'm an academic'. I cloaked myself in these words, but they failed to shield me from feeling like I was somehow out of place, like I did not belong. I would leave these consultations charged with guilt. I had not contributed enough, I told myself. I had not served the house of power with sufficient diligence. I was so enraptured, seduced anew each time I received an invitation to a consultation, I didn't stop to think for very long about what earthly use a discourse theorist might be in a policy discussion. But each time, I dismissed immediately the notion of declining. 'I would be delighted to attend...', I wrote. 'Thank you for your kind invitation...', I responded. 'Of course I would be happy to join you to discuss...'. Of course. I'm an academic.

And now my second story: I like words. I find the production of meaning fascinating, and teasing out the practices of meaning-production deeply gratifying. I am wholly comfortable working with documents, statements, resolutions, and other kinds of textual artefacts. And yet, for this most recent research project, I decided to undertake interviews. I'm still not entirely sure where this impulse came from. When I wrote up the application for funding for this project, back in 2012, I used lots of words I had left in dark recesses of my brain to gather dust since the conclusion of my Masters in Social Science Research Methods. 'Sample', 'snowball', 'semi-structured': they were unfamiliar and strange yet felt seductive in their scientific status (and their sibilance). Writing this account of my research felt like the performance of 'proper' social scientist, affirmed by the award of a grant from the Australian Research Council to undertake this research, to do this 'fieldwork'.

Except I didn't go to 'the field', of course, whatever that might mean; Oliver Richmond, Stefanie Kappler and Annika Björkdahl have written beautifully about the compromised conceptual status of 'the field' in peace research, arguing that it 'carries colonial baggage in terms of denoting "backwardness" and conflictual practices, as well as legitimizing the need for intervention by peacebuilding, statebuilding and development actors' (2015, 25). I concur with their reading of 'the

field' as frequently represented in scholarship on peacebuilding and development, but mine was a different field. I didn't go to their field. I went to New York, in the summer of 2013 and then again in 2014. I rattled around the city trying to keep cool in the slick, sweaty heat with Ani DiFranco lyrics about the East River and the F train in my head; I winced at people drinking iced black coffee, which I maintain is an abomination, and my son developed a taste for chocolate frozen yoghurt. We explored Central Park on the weekend, he danced under the sprinklers in the play park and I watched him with joy and thought about my next interview, or my last interview, or how good it felt to have told people, 'Yeah, we're going to New York in the summer, I'm doing some work on peacebuilding at the UN'. It made me feel like a proper researcher, where working with documents (or, worse still, with television shows, of which I have also been guilty) has always made me feel somehow *less than* proper.

'I'm doing fieldwork', I would tell myself, as I handed over my passport to the security staff at the East 46th Street gate, receiving in return a grainy and unflattering temporary ID allowing me access to UN HQ. 'I'm doing fieldwork', I thought, as I took a screenshot of my iPad connecting to the wifi network and shared it on Facebook. 'I'm doing fieldwork', I reminded myself, as I eventually remembered to switch on my little hand-held audio recorder and steer the conversation with those kind enough to meet with me around to peacebuilding, and away from restaurant recommendations and the delights of the New York Hall of Science for a tech-obsessed five-year-old and his adoring parents. 'I'm doing fieldwork'. 'I'm an academic'.

So those are two little vignettes that sit with me, weigh on me, have inspired me to think about what those statements mean, as I have struggled to make sense of these, and other research encounters: 'I'm an academic', 'I'm doing fieldwork'. What does it mean to make those claims? Who is this person, this self of whom I am, in Judith Butler's terms, attempting to give an account? When I embark with a new research student upon a new supervisory journey, I talk to them about research. One of my favourite aphorisms to share is the etymology of the word 'research'. It comes from Old French, *re-*, meaning 'with intensity or force' and *cerchier*, meaning 'to search'. So 'research' means to search with intensity, to search closely, to seek. I talk then with my new students about what it is they are seeking, what do they hope that their journey will show them, what is it that ultimately they think they might find. I have found that, for me, the research process is a process of seeking. I have sought documents that codify slippery and unstable meanings momentarily, the logics of which produce an architecture that is unique to its time but also timeless in its form and structure. I have sought 'research participants' to talk to about stuff, to whom I most singularly fail to explain eloquently what it is that I seek, though I expect them to join me in my investigation. I have sought permission from the Human Research Ethics Approval Panel to talk to those same research participants, and fumed at what I perceived to be nonsensical modifications demanded to enable my research to be deemed 'ethical', whatever

that means. I have sought answers, to research questions that I determined prior, as if we can ever really know what our question is before we begin our research journey with an open heart and a curious mind. And I have sought validation. 'I'm doing fieldwork', because anyone who can read can tell you what a Security Council resolution says, so where is the value in that? 'I'm an academic', because what I really mean to say is, 'I'm an expert, I belong here. Accept this. Accept me'.

So we seek, when we research, when we *re-cerchier*, and also, we find. I have found my self – or, more accurately, my selves – as I have practiced my research and as I have encountered my research worlds. I am produced as I research. Intuitively this is true: I am produced as a scholar worthy of note (worthy of publication or promotion) as I practice my research and it secures me competitively allocated external funding or plaudits from peers. I reproduce this when I write the next funding application, or application for promotion, or proposal for a book or a Special Issue of a journal, and as I reproduce this identity so the 'I' who makes these claims is constituted. But there are interesting silences in the accounts of myself that I give in these formal domains. I do not speak of my insecurities, my sense of imposture, my fear that I – not my work, but *I* – am not 'proper' in the eyes of my discipline. These echoing silences prompt reflection: who is this 'I', and who is she not? Of what 'I' are these particular practices performative? What is my responsibility to this 'I', when I am driven half-mad by a desire to play hooky and keep my son out of school for the day, to bundle him in the car and drive to the ocean and join him in floating head back in the murky blue water looking up at the brilliant blue sky, so we can feel but not see each other's smiles, feel only that and nothing else?

Research may be a quest, but it is also productive, and not in the ways caught in the limited imagination of the neoliberal university. Research produces us, our selves as researchers, just as the practices of research we perform 'enact our worlds', to paraphrase Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans (2014). I have been deeply inspired by Aradau and Huysmans' brilliant essay on the politics of methodology, which also has as its focus the productivity of research. As they say,

methods need to be understood as performative rather than representational [...] They are not simply techniques of extracting information from reality and aligning it with – or against – bodies of knowledge. Methods are instead within worlds and partake in their shaping. As performative, methods are practices through which "truthful" worlds are enacted, both in the sense of being acted upon and coming into being (Aradau and Huysmans 2014, 598).

To their insightful exposition, I would suggest that we, as researchers (and mothers, co-workers, life partners, voracious readers, bakers of delicious treats) are of these worlds, we come into being through our research practices at the same time as we enact them.

This has felt more true for me in this recent research than in other projects I have undertaken, and is not a controversial intellectual step to take, I think. As Aradau and Huysmans show, reconfiguring the terrain of discussion over methods

in IR foregrounds the productive power of methods as acts that bring into being certain objects, and subjects, and the relations between them while disrupting others. Reading this insight through a decade or more steeped in the theorisation of identity as performance raises the question of where the 'self' is located in Aradau and Huysmans' analysis and how the self is enacted. I am responding to the deliberation in *Critical Security Methods: New Frameworks for Analysis*, where the editors encourage us as readers to ask 'what method does as a practice' (Aradau, Huysmans, Neal and Volkner, 2015, 6), trying to extend their critical engagement with the politics of method to explore the performative constitution of the self through research. Put simply, I theorise that Aradau and Huysmans are on to something: methods enact the world. But research – including but not limited to methods – also enacts the self, the 'I' who claims: 'I'm doing fieldwork, I'm an academic'.

And this is, of course, a fundamentally gendered process. Gender, as Cynthia Enloe notably remarked, makes the world go round (2000, 1, and *passim*): it structures how we think about, and act in, the world, and orders the relationship between bodies and behaviours. This is as true for the researcher as it is for the politician, the firefighter, and the artist. We cannot escape being read through the lens of our gender presentation and our gendered identities are produced through our research practices just as they are produced through any other of the social practices in which we engage. We cannot escape the logics of research as a gendered intervention.

As I mused on the question of how my self and my research are co-constituted, I pondered also the question of what makes this research feminist. Is it enough that I espouse, overtly and publicly, a feminist politics? Is it enough that I am attentive to the dynamics of gendered power? That I am always looking to understand better how gendered power operates in any given discursive terrain, including the terrains in/through which I am produced as a subject: the academy, the research encounter, the journal article, the meandering discussions over dinner with friends? In my search for an answer to the question of what is feminist about feminist research, I found no more eloquent account than that provided by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber. She explains:

To engage in feminist theory and praxis means to challenge knowledge that excludes, while seeming to include [...] Feminists ask "new" questions that place women's lives and those of "other" marginalized groups at the center of social inquiry. Feminist research disrupts traditional ways of knowing to create rich new meanings, a process that Trinh (1991) terms becoming "both/and" – insider and outsider – taking on a multitude of different standpoints and negotiating these identities simultaneously (Hesse-Biber 2012, 3).

We feminists challenge, in our research practices, we disrupt and we look opposite, beyond and sideways at the conventional sites of enquiry. We unsettle that which is frequently taken for granted, including the very categories we use to think with, the identities we perform and those structures of comfortable, comforting, privilege

and power we enjoy. I can bear being disruptive. Even the writing of this account is a form of disruption, but it is a disruption (of scholarly conventions and expectations) performed by a self to whom certain privilege has accrued. I can choose to spend my time writing this account, to invest effort and energy in these reflections and revelations, and not fear reprisal or reprimand for having expended my resources in this way, for I have reached a stage in my career at which, especially when combined with the luxury of employment security, I am driven not by institutional imperatives but by my own. There are other fears, of course: as Inayatullah admits, 'we fear our revelations will mark us for having indulged in navel-gazing and for having showcased our vanity' (2011, 7-8), but these are fears of a different order that do not touch me at the precise moment that I sit down to consider really what it means to me to disrupt, to be both inside and outside, to practice feminist research.

When turning over the question in my mind, of how a feminist self is constituted through feminist research, rather than simply building on my account of feminist research to argue that the converse logic holds (if feminist research pays attention to the 'concept, nature, and practice of gender', per Zalewski's formulation [1995, 339], then research that pays attention to the 'concept, nature, and practice of gender' is done by feminists, QED), I turned to the question of science. I was reminded of 'the science question' in design of the research project I recently concluded, as I was so seduced by the scientism of the social research methods I sought to 'employ' (as though methods are tools that can be applied to a willing world, to extract with ease the knowledge that lies undisturbed within, waiting only for the right question to be asked in order that this knowledge might spring forth and bathe the research in the soft glow of enlightenment). Feminist research attends to the gendered dynamics of power that have historically excluded women from the subject-position of 'authentic knower' or 'figure of authority' yet recognises that in the practices of feminist research stows away the privilege of authority and authenticity that we critique.

This point of argumentation is indebted to Sandra Harding, and her posing of *The Science Question in Feminism*: 'Is it possible', she asks, 'to use for emancipatory ends sciences that are apparently so intimately involved in Western, bourgeois, and masculine projects?' (1986, 9). In the practice of using such sciences, I would venture, I am implicated as a feminist researcher in the 'Western, bourgeois, and masculine projects' and I benefit from the authority that such an association brings. By simple virtue of my association with the academy, even as I present my unruly, poststructural, adventures in language for evaluation, I am performed as an authoritative figure, if not a figure of authority. 'I'm an academic'. Feminist research is intensely attuned to power, and is yet complicit in its exercise when I – as a feminist researcher – claim its benefit. The feminist self performed in discomfittingly, I invoke the power of science in order to 'walk the halls' of political power (Halley 2006, 21). I am embarrassed to admit this, and I wonder what it means for my feminism and my research.

So the feminist self produced through my research is curious, yes, but also conflicted, and compromised. I reflect on this, as I move in and through the spaces of my research. I think about what to wear to walk those halls of power, to meet with the UN staff who are generously giving of their time, and I am immediately furious with myself for caring even a little, as though my feminism should elevate me above such base concerns. I examine my decisions (sartorial and otherwise) unflinchingly: have you noticed that we are rarely as kind to ourselves as we can be to others? And I wonder: what does this mean for me, as a feminist, as a researcher, as a being in the world? Can I separate my feminist self from my researcher self, from all my other selves? Am I a feminist? Am I an academic? My self is inextricably bound up in my research, I feel.

I feel. My back aches, up into my right shoulder, because I wore heels yesterday, unusually for me, and I do not sit comfortably at my desk. My body tells a story of my professional life and my manifest inability to practice constructive levels of self-care; I grind my teeth, I suffer from migraine, I have perpetual tension in my jaw and shoulders, and I feel pain like guilt that I am failing myself so I can succeed for others. My self-hood is woven through my research practices, as I account for the choices that I make and explain how and why I came to the decisions that I did during the conduct of research. I am implicated in, and produced through, my research practices. According to Kim England, 'part of the feminist project has been to dismantle the smokescreen surrounding the canons of neopositivist research – impartiality and objectivist neutrality – which supposedly prevent the researcher from contaminating the data (and, presumably, vice versa)' (1994, 81). I am a contaminant. Am I a feminist? Am I an academic?

The practice of research – the search – is the perfect performative moment of Foucault's power/knowledge nexus. Foucault theorised that power and knowledge are indivisible, two sides of the same coin: there can be no claim to know that is not simultaneously an expression of power, and every expression of power carries with it, overtly or covertly, a claim to know. Foucault even indicted academic researchers directly in the production of knowledge claims, when he proposed that 'It is necessary to think of the political problems of intellectuals not in terms of "science" and "ideology" but in terms of "truth" and "power"' ([1994] 2000, 132). Foucault implicates 'science' as a regime of truth, an assemblage of statements that pre- and proscribe that which is thinkable in regard to a given issue. If the target of our investigation is knowledge itself, then we must recognise that the circumstances of knowledge production – again, to quote Foucault, 'the systems of power that produce and sustain it, and [the] effects of power which it induces and which extend it' ([1994] 2000, 132) – operate according to a logic of science. The subject, produced through research, then – even in the face of avowedly post- or anti-positivist declarations to the contrary – is the subject of science, the scientist.

In this context, the work of Patrick Jackson appeals to me in its incisive critique of the disciplinary function of 'science' in International Relations. As Jackson says, in IR – the context in which I research, and am therefore (re)produced

– “science” remains a notion to conjure with ... and a powerful resource it is too: charging that a piece of work is not “scientific” carries immensely negative connotations’ (2001, 9). Even as a feminist, even as I look opposite, beyond and sideways at the conventional sites of enquiry, I perform my research credentials in accordance with the logic of science because this is the connotation of the academy that I claim. When I make that claim, I’m not a writer, or a theorist, or even a feminist: I’m an academic.

So I travel to meetings in Canberra alone, and sit alongside (but not *with*, not really, not with) the many others in the room and I think my interior thoughts and I stay quiet, and watchful. I sit in airless, over-conditioned meeting rooms in New York and fumble with my papers and wait for the hot flash of shame to pass when I am asked for a business card and I cannot readily provide one. I squirm, uncomfortable in my entirely not ergonomic desk chair in my office, and I cross the floor to retrieve a book to flick through, as though the words of other people will save me when the opposite is true: I will drown in them, in their words, and my own blank spaces, and the helpless teeth-grinding awfulness of having nothing new to say. I tweet a link to my latest article and deliberate sharing that same link on Facebook – can I find the right degree of self-deprecation, the appropriately humble yet accomplished tone? – before updating my University profile page lest anyone visit and be misled by the absence of this crucial detail about me. I am an academic. I am barely a feminist. I am not a mother, in these moments, nor a friend, a hopeless dancer, a reckless driver. I am mostly alone.

How can this be otherwise, I wonder? How can I produce feminist research and be produced through this research in ways that feel true to me? How can I understand and make sense of the ‘I’ that is produced through the research practices of a feminist self? The concept of positionality, to me, relates to the position of the researcher in relation to her research environment, her position in the social world: it is a consciousness of self, but a self assumed fully formed, a priori in the research process. Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True (2008, 698) propose that ‘[t]he researcher [...] needs to situate herself with respect to the ways in which being a researcher is itself a boundary that affects research’. I find this boundary to be porous: my positionings, which are inevitably multiple, both affect and effect what I bring to the research encounter. Crucially, I view positionality is inescapably relational: as we engage in research as a social encounter, those with whom we engage create positions for us in their cognitive frameworks, to make sense for themselves of who we are and what we bring. I am read through my gender, my race, my nationality, my class and these readings position me differently in relation to my multiple others depending on the context in which I am encountered.

In the practice of my research, I make not only political claims about what exists in the world and how we can know it, but also inescapably normative claims about the kind of world that I want to bring into being: in my case, one that is attuned to the operation of gendered power. How I constitute my research practice is, in the Butlerian sense, an account of my self: ‘And when we do act and speak, we

not only disclose ourselves but act on the schemes of intelligibility that govern who will be a speaking being, subjecting them to rupture or revision, consolidating their norms, or contesting their hegemony' (Butler 2005, 132). And my self is constituted through these 'schemes of intelligibility', always already in relation to the many others with whom I interact. Who counts in my research, which questions I ask, and the assumptions that I make about the validity and viability of different forms of knowledge are intrinsic elements of the research encounter. These elements are inevitably shaped by my subjectivity and emerge in and through my research practice; they are informed by and inform my engagement with people, books, fields, offices, social mediascapes and seashores. I am grateful to all the people I have met in the course of my searches for what they have taught me. I carry them with me and I am not alone after all. I am partly, but never wholly, the product of my searches, my seeking with intensity a better understanding of peace and security in a world that is always in process. I am a feminist. I am an academic.

It is in these affective connections that I find solace, even purpose; they enable me in ways that I cannot fully comprehend. Being a feminist, being an academic: these are relational identities for me, subject-positions that cannot exist – not only philosophically but also in a material, embodied sense – without others, but not others against whom to define myself but others with whom I can navigate these insecurities and explore the silences in the account that I give of my self. Carolyn Ellis asks, 'Is ethnography only about the other? Isn't ethnography also relational, about the other and the "I" of the researcher in interaction? Might the researcher also be a subject?' (2004, xix), to which I respond: I have made my self the subject of this exposition, but I am always a situated subject and this brings not only comfort but also context. This may not be autoethnography in the strict, methodological, sense, but it is writing, of me, and people, and the relationality of the research practices through which I am produced is inextricably linked to its politics, its purpose.

I opened by asking, where are the silences in the selves we admit to? I have laid bare dimensions of my self that were previously hidden. I have explored the qualities of the 'I' constituted through research encounters, the nature of the relationship between feminist research ethic and feminist researcher, the seductive interpellative power of the subject of 'expert' and the insecurities inherent in occupying that position. These are not themes I have written on before and this is a voice I have silenced in my professional writings; there is a purpose, I believe, to speaking with this voice, a purpose beyond authenticity. Jackson, mentioned above, commented of his own stories: 'I don't know what these stories mean; I don't know just what kind of work they do. I do know that they feel in some difficult-to-define sense like *authentic* expressions' (2011, 172, emphasis in original). The account I have given above feels similarly like an authentic expression, but I am intrigued to explore further the question of 'what kind of work' my account does.

I presented a draft of this paper at the LSE Gender Institute, where I spent a very happy period as a Visiting Fellow during the sabbatical I mentioned at the

outset. I was terrified to give voice to these reflections, to perform this fragile, contingent, uncertain self and to admit to the insecurities and failings that I acknowledge as part of the 'I' that I am when I claim to be a feminist academic. I was anxious, in reading the paper, not only because of the confessions previously unspoken and unacknowledged, but also because I had not yet, at that stage, arrived at a reasonable response to the very legitimate question of why anyone in that audience should care about my rambling account of my fragmented selves. I knew then, as now, that I do not believe 'that "telling one's story" in a personally reflective way is enough to produce insightful scholarship or engender political transformation' (Brigg and Bleiker 2010, 789). But I did not know then how I could marshal this account in a way that would feel both authentic, but also transformative.

Much relies on the question of what exists to be transformed. Morgan Brigg and Roland Bleiker argue that part of the transformation that can be facilitated through the conduct of autoethnography is epistemological; the recognition that 'insights through the self are always already formed in relationship with the world and others' (2010, 796) challenges the presumption that the 'proper' academic is the lone star hero of her own social world and that 'proper' academic knowledge is objective and – importantly – highly individualized. This epistemological transformation is significant, but I see the purpose of what I have recounted here slightly differently. I do not wish to start a revolution from my desk (charming though it is, with the camellias in bloom outside and the scent of mandarins lingering from lunch *al desko*) but rather to comfort; the transformation I seek is personal-political, rather than disciplinary- or knowledge-political. IR as a discipline surely has difficulties with knowledge, and I have always been relatively ill-disciplined. There are professional risks, of course, in refusing to be bound by disciplines, and a degree of reckoning that is therefore required when thinking through the presentation of deliberation in this way.

We know that narrative is fundamental to the social self; 'we are *homo fabulans* because we interpret and tell stories about who we are or want to be, and what we believe' (Wibben 2011, 43). We might accept that narrative, including autoethnography, is fundamental to knowing about the social world. But I feel that the connection between our professional selves and our social worlds is tenuous. We do not yet admit how so many of our professional practices – the crafting of a journal article, the drafting of a funding bid or promotion application – are practices of narration. We are required, frequently and forcefully, to give accounts of our selves, but not accounts that admit the tensions and compromises that I have documented here; these tensions and compromises are remembered, rather than written, and are thus constituted as private, to be silenced (Dauphinee 2010, 805). In the accounts that are validated, the selves that are constituted are stable, whole, and coherent entities that perform and are performed by an illusion of certainty. 'In our sanitised, self-evacuated, academic landscape, we become the "hideous beings swallowed up by our scholarly clothes, the dancing fools under the fluorescent

lights of our paradigms and theories that voraciously consume our thoughts, hammer the soul from our words, and drain our voices of any traces of humanity” (Doty quoted in Dauphinee 2010, 808). There is no such illusion here. So, first, I think that the political purchase of elaborating on research as a gendered intervention is to show that illusion for the chimera that it is. Such an act of resistance is in service of the transformation of the academy into a space of humility, uncertainty, and hope in spite of these things. There is little hope to be found when all questions have been answered and all possibilities exhausted. Identifying the performative practices through which I am constituted and exploring these practices as a narrative account of my self contributes to a vision of the social world that is not fixed and closed, but in the process of becoming, where possibility is very much alive.

The second dimension of political transformation stays with Elizabeth Dauphinee’s question of ethical scholarship (2010) and extends the imbrication of the self in research to a consideration of context: what is the nature of the social world that we produce through our research encounters, our professional encounters and our professional practices? I face, am constrained by, and am constituted through, myriad technologies of power in my immediate institutional context: the way I must account for myself in a case for promotion, or conduct myself in a senior management meeting, or submit my syllabus for review and inspection. Each of these configures my academic world as a collection of successful and productive individuals, for this is how I am disciplined in the academy to think of my self. We compete (for funding), we evaluate each other (often harshly), we protect and hold close our academic judgements (in both teaching and research) and we hide our failures from our selves and each other. The university in late modernity delights in the fiction of academic staff as functionally equivalent units, and fosters the growing sense of individualization, neglect, and loneliness that results in the growing numbers of people leaving the academy, or staying within and being broken by a system that insists it is a meritocracy, and therefore if there is a shortcoming or flaw it resides within the individual. This is a lie. And it is a lie not because we, as individuals, are not flawed, but because we, as individuals, must relinquish our social bonds, our affective relationships with each other and our many others – those with whom we interact in research, in parks, in pubs, and in lecture theatres – in service of the flexibilisation of labour and commodification of knowledge in the neoliberal academy.

The neoliberal academy cannot quantify the bonds that support and sustain us as scholars. It cannot comprehend the connective tissue that binds us as a community, even as we bicker and quibble and are generally disagreeable to each other. It cannot recognize or value the collaborative, the social, the relational dimensions of our worlds. So this is the second point of political purchase: I tell this story to draw attention to how I am saved as a scholar, as an ‘I’-being, by acknowledging those bonds, and protecting – in word and deed – that connective tissue. I need to narrate my self in relation to my multiple others in order to

understand the quality and texture of those connections, and to understand how they will continue to nourish me. This is a transformation of community: to ask that we as a community nurture and nourish each other not only in an abstract sense, by practicing hope and kindness, but in the very concrete sense of recounting – or accounting – our selves as we are constituted in our endeavours and how we are never individual, never alone.

Afterword: There are still so many silences here. There are many stories that I have not written here, many more that I will not write. But I have written this one, and that is something. I hope that it is enough.

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