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The Blurring of “Home” and “Field”

"Fieldwork", Homework and Patchwork in Accompanied Ethnographic Research

Paper proposal for the planned handbook “Accompanied Fieldwork in Anthropology”, edited by Julia Koch-Tshirangwana, Judit Tavakoli & Sophia Thubauville, cp. GAA Working Group „Family in the Field” & Handbook Project “Accompanied Fieldwork in Anthropology”

Affective ties are central in ethnographic knowledge production (Stodulka, Dinkelaker, and Thajib 2019) and, thanks to the reflexive (Asad 1973; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Behar 1996) and relational (Strathern 1988; Jackson 1989; Spencer and Davies 2010) turns in anthropology in recent decades, more and more anthropologists overtly recognize their emotional, social and political positions, involvements and entanglements in the contexts of their ethnographic research. However, the real working and living conditions of anthropologists (Günel and Watanabe 2024), as well as their familiar entanglements and accompanied research experiences still occupy a marginal position in anthropological issues, being mainly relegated to methodological discussions (Braukmann et al. 2020). Despite its marginality, accompanied ethnographic research has deep impacts on knowledge production, both epistemologically and in terms of the researcher’s positionality (cf. Paideuma special issue). In fact, while being accompanied, ethnographers are perceived in other ways than when they conduct research alone. They do have access to different information and produce different interactions during research. Accompanied research also leads to challenges in organization, often leading to more fragmented research that differs from the standard ethnographic research such as it is still taught nowadays in ethnographic cursus.

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If most ethnographic research leads to mobility between different sites where anthropologists establish more or less durable affective ties with people and place, sometimes leading to the feeling of 'being at home' in a place considered a research site, accompanied research may accentuate both mobility and attachment to people and places. Accompanied research implies care for others that may broaden and consolidate the affective relations in which ethnographers are embedded, during or outside research time. Furthermore, taking into account the basic needs of ethnographers and their accompanying relatives, can reinforce mobility between different places.

In this chapter, focusing on accompanied research experiences, we question the impact of affective ties on the feeling of being at home and on research practices. We argue that research is a holistic process that does not only take place in the 'field', but often irrupts in personal spaces associated with 'home'. Ethnography is as much a practice at 'home' as in the 'field'.

The practice of 'fieldwork' lies at the core of ethnography and builds on the concept of 'field' as opposed to 'home'. We first give an overview of the construction, legacy and persistence of the 'home' – 'field' dichotomy in anthropology, that persists even in literature on accompanied research. Yet, these concepts have been questioned during the last decades, mainly by postcolonial, feminist and diasporic scholars (Visweswaran 1994; D'Amico-Samuels 1997). Accompanied research scholars have pointed to similar questioning, adding new arguments to the critics of the concept of 'field': in many situations, accompanied ethnographic research participates to the blurring of the anthropological established categories of 'home' and 'field' (cf. Paideuma special issue). During accompanied research, because of affective ties and mobility, boundaries between the two categories are rather porous and shifting.

We then turn to a recount of the many criticisms raised by postcolonial, feminist and 'native' (Narayan 1993) or 'halfie' (Abu-Lughod 1991) scholars to the dichotomy 'home' – 'field'. We show how these critics led to the proposal of concepts such as

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'anthropology at home' (Hymes 1972; Messerschmidt 1981; Jackson 1987), fieldwork as a 'specific kind of localized dwelling' (Clifford 1997:21), 'reverse anthropology' (Wagner 1981), or 'homework' (Visweswaran 1994). Critics of the 'home' – 'field' dichotomy also led to the questioning of the concepts 'home' and 'field' themselves; D'Amico-Samuels (1997), for instance, proposes to abandon the term 'field' and to use 'research experiences'.

We understand our practice as patchwork ethnography (Watanabe, Varma, and Günel 2020; Günel and Watanabe 2024), that has recently been proposed as an alternative to open the black box and acknowledge the multiple limits, commitments and entanglements, would they be personal, political, emotional, and embodied, of anthropologists and their research projects. Patchwork ethnography enables to reveal the patchy and fragmented research experiences that anthropologists may live during their research while caring for others. The proposal responds to the changing conditions of academia, such as neoliberal pressures on science productivity (Yin and Mu 2023), precarious situations in academia, increasing transnational mobility (including of scholars and their families) and diversity in academia. The current academic conditions lead to a growing patchiness of research practices and methodologies. At the same time, patchwork ethnography responds to the increasing fragmentation and patchiness of the world, recently attested by many scholars (Tsing et al. 2024).

We use the practice of herstorying, that is to care for our stories that complexify research experiences and 'make openings for new kinds of stories to tell' (Yates-Doerr 2020:240), stories that include multiple entanglements, the blurring of 'field' and 'home', and the embodied and emotional dimensions of patchy (un)accompanied research experiences. We thus integrate concrete examples from our experiences, informal talks about accompanied fieldwork and from ethnographic literature. We aim to integrate herstories that illustrate the diversities of challenges raised by the blurring of 'home' and 'field' and solutions proposed by ethnographers these last

decades. These herstories also broaden the concept of accompanied research, which includes not only parenthood, but also other affective ties, such as to relatives (parents, siblings, and step-families) and friends.

Our goal is to give practical resources for anthropologists 1) that may start their research while being accompanied by one or various relatives, or 2) that already experienced such situations but did not find the theoretical support to integrate these "excessive" data (Willink 2010) into their research dissertations.

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