QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN DANGEROUS PLACES: BECOMING AN "ETHNOGRAPHER" OF VIOLENCE AND PERSONAL SAFETY

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ABOUT THE SERIES

Over the last generation, activists, journalists, and researchers working in Latin America have increasingly faced the challenge of operating in areas affected by chronic police and non-state violence. Further, rising crime rates are leading a growing number of scholars to conduct research on high-risk topics, which involves gathering data on communities that experience conflict, writing and publishing on these difficult and sensitive issues, and developing and implementing programs to deal with the needs of communities affected by violence as well as the wider conflicts in which those communities are embedded. Despite these trends, the literature on safe practices for those working in high-risk environments remains thin. The DSD Working Papers on Research Security series seeks to address this deficit by examining a range of research security concerns, providing a framework to help those working in the region consider how they can enhance their own safety as well as the safety of their associates and research participants.

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Conducting qualitative research is a challenge in any environment, but in highly violent settings the obstacles to both successful outcomes and researcher safety are especially high. Not only are the usual problems that confront qualitative researchers intensified when fear and insecurity add to local people's tendency to mistrust strangers asking questions; environments marked by high levels of criminal, political, and/or daily social violence require researchers to be constantly alert to threats to their own physical safety, and to the ways in which their research can imperil their subjects and collaborators. While some dangers will be obvious, such as people firing guns or waving knives, they may include more subtle things as well, like being in the wrong place at the wrong time, witnessing an activity one shouldn't, asking the wrong question of the wrong person, revealing the extent of one's personal resources and equipment, or inadvertently violating the unwritten codes that govern violent areas. Extreme caution is needed, not only when doing research, but when carrying out the daily business of living and working as well.

Qualitative researchers working in highly violent settings confront the same risks and dangers that the inhabitants must confront on a regular basis. And like the people who are often the subjects of their research inquiries,

researchers must learn how to keep themselves safe in places where violence is always a possibility. One effective way to do this is to adopt the local cultural and linguistic norms their subjects use to promote their own security. In other words, researchers, regardless of discipline, can become "ethnographers" of local violence and the responses it engenders and emulate the behaviors their informants have learned to keep themselves safe.

THE DANGERS WE FACE

Given how often they work in potentially dangerous settings, the infrequency with which qualitative researchers have explicitly discussed safety is surprising. The authors of one of the few comprehensive reviews of the literature on the topic observe that, while researchers frequently study subjects who are exposed to danger from violence, "it is difficult to understand why there is such an absence of reflection upon [the researchers] themselves as vulnerable beings in volatile situations."[1]

Qualitative research abroad, almost by definition, requires that we put ourselves at risk. Personal safety is generally best achieved by sticking to what is familiar, and research often means putting ourselves in unfamiliar situations.[2] The sources of danger in violent areas are legion, some very obvious and others more obscure. Areas with high levels of violent crime may be characterized by random violence, including street crimes such as robbery and murder. In some areas young people (especially young men) are a particular threat, either individually or in groups, which might include youth gangs or packs of street children; more organized sources of criminal violence include drug gangs or mafias. Violence may also come from the state—from the police, the military, or paramilitary units and agents—or it may be more intimate, perpetrated within the household by male authority figures and disproportionately affecting women and children.

A researcher's vulnerability to violence may be influenced by identity, including one's race, age, or sexuality.[3] Gender plays a particularly significant role in relationships between researchers and subjects, and women researchers may face threats ranging from jokes, innuendo, and inappropriate physical contact[4] to sexual harassment[5] and rape.[6] Travel—local or long distance—can pose risks, especially in areas where kidnapping of apparently well-off travelers is endemic.[7] In all such cases, the threat of violence represents not only the immediate harm violence does to the people directly affected but also the resulting generalized atmosphere of dread and

anxiety for those who reside or work in the area where it occurs. Suspicion, fear of the unknown, breakdown of community and affective ties, the erosion of public life, restrictions on individual movement—all of these are potential consequences of violence, and all have an impact on the kind of work qualitative researchers can do.

Qualitative research of all kinds is predicated on establishing relationships with individuals in local environments so the researchers can receive permission to study and gain access to the subjects in whom they are interested. Getting along with local people—establishing rapport with them—is the essential first step in launching any kind of qualitative research project. Even a researcher only planning to interview randomly selected informants must have a general working knowledge of the research area and good, trusted contacts who work or reside there. Under ordinary conditions, establishing such relationships can be a long and difficult process, in which researchers must invest a great deal of time, energy, and resources in making themselves locally known and trusted. In highly violent settings, local people are likely to be even more skeptical of a researcher's motives than people elsewhere, and the rapport-building process may seem unending.[8]

Indeed, in violent and dangerous contexts, especially where people are coming and going all the time and some are engaged in illegal activities, new doubts about a researcher's presence and goals may continually reappear, no matter how long the researcher is present at the site or how comfortable he or she begins to feel. An additional problem is that the only outsiders to a local context who typically ask a lot of questions are government officials—tax collectors, police authorities, housing inspectors, and the like—and local people are conditioned to dissemble whenever such investigators come poking around.

This wariness can be further burdened by nationality and past experience. Elsewhere I have used the Spanish word *desconfianza* to characterize the suspicion with which inhabitants of Villa Sebastián Pagador—a violent and illegally settled *barrio* on the outskirts of Cochabamba, Bolivia—regarded me throughout my eighteen months of residence in the community.[9] I worked hard during this time to befriend people in the study community and largely felt successful in doing so. But despite my best efforts to convince them otherwise, some in the community persisted in believing I was with the CIA or the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and intent on revealing the secrets they tried diligently to conceal.

A long history of US imperialism in various places worldwide has predis-posed some people to consider any American a possible threat, the nature of which might depend on the local or national context. In Bolivia, for example, where political conflict with the United States frequently emerges around coca eradication policies, suspicions that I might be a DEA agent did not come as a surprise. The local people's feelings became even more compre-hensible as I came to learn that many in the *barrio* worked seasonally in the lowland coca-growing region of Cochabamba. In other settings, local people themselves might be confused with representatives of antagonistic groups, including national security forces—such is often the case in post-conflict settings where the legacies of violence have damaged social relations and rifts established during wartime have yet to heal. Affiliations or friendships with such individuals may become problematic, casting a shadow over the researcher's own public reputation or identity.

By their very presence in the study community, qualitative researchers con-tribute another layer of insecurity to an already insecure, violent setting. They imperil local stability by throwing out of whack the careful balance people who live and work in violent areas set up in their lives so as to put themselves in as little danger as possible as they transact their daily busi-ness. Such activities as hanging around while others are working, having no apparent purpose for being present, showing up at inopportune moments, intruding in private domains, asking lots of nosy questions, having more money and better stuff than most people in the neighborhood, and so on introduce a new source of ambiguity and potential hazard. Raymond Lee has identified the danger provoked by the researcher's presence or work as "situational" to distinguish it from the more pervasive "ambient" danger that is generally present in a particular setting.[10] The researcher is, there-fore, at once in danger (from the violence that always circulates locally) and a source of danger, attracting the attention of those who value the status quo and object to the researcher's apparent "meddling," or who fear the unknown repercussions of the outsider's presence—someone who makes the already dangerous place seem even more perilous.[11]

DEALING WITH DANGER

If they are to be successful in their work and stay safe while conducting it without jeopardizing the safety of their informants and collaborators, quali-tative researchers of all disciplines must develop a very clear understand-ing of the research environment and employ techniques for avoiding danger.

This is a process the researcher can initiate very early on, even prior to arriving at the research site, and continue to develop during the course of the research process. One approach is to learn and adopt the safety techniques of local collaborators—what I call an "ethnographic" approach to researcher safety. The disciplinary orientation of the researcher is not important here. Whatever the methodology or theoretical emphasis the researcher brings to the site, he or she can behave "ethnographically" by treating the topic of violence and safety itself as an object of inquiry and attending to how local people understand and deal with violence, its sources, and its perpetrators.

Wherever people live with violence, they develop strategies for managing the risks to their safety and well being. Residents of violent neighborhoods, for example, develop mental maps of their environs, knowing where it is safe to be and at what times of the day, and which areas one must habitually avoid. They know who controls certain spaces, be they state officials or other, less formal kinds of authorities to whom they must nonetheless pay their respects. People know what subjects are off limits for conversation and have their own nuanced language for oblique discussions of dangerous topics. If payoffs are required—either for access to an influential person or to maintain certain privileges an outsider might take for granted, such as freedom of movement without fear of harassment—people in these contexts know whom to pay and how much. When the tear gas and bullets start flying, people know where to hide and when it is safe to go out again. Even young children learn these basic rules of survival, although they, like their adult relatives, might be unwilling or unable to articulate them as formal sets of normative behaviors.

Two fundamental methods generally included in qualitative research programs are interviewing (unstructured, semi-structured, or structured; formal or informal) and participant observation. Both of these activities imply certain risks, both for the researcher and the research subject, and these are especially heightened in areas of endemic violence. To counter them, the researcher must adopt certain basic approaches that are used by the local people themselves to minimize the dangers they regularly encounter in their daily lives. Below, I outline some specific recommendations for these approaches. It is important to remember throughout, however, that successful research cannot be carried out according to a fixed script; rather, as J. Christopher Kovats-Bernat observes, qualitative research in dangerous areas must be "an elastic, incorporative, integrative, and malleable practice," to respond to the particular contingencies of a given site.[12] Flexibility

is key to researcher safety, as is a willingness to adjust or even cut short one's research plans in response to safety concerns.

Planning

In general, qualitative researchers need to anticipate danger and prepare responses to it before they arrive in the field. In arguing for the establishment of a "safety protocol" prior to fieldwork, Barbara Paterson, David Gregory, and Sally Thorne observe that advance planning not only makes good sense; it in fact fulfills a moral commitment to informants and assistants to ensure the research does not bring them harm.[13] Researchers can imagine potentially dangerous situations and, in collaboration with their teams, develop responses before encountering them.[14] Whether or not one develops a written protocol (as Paterson, Gregory, and Thorne suggest), advance planning can prepare researchers and their assistants to assess potential dangers and empower them to retreat when a threat is perceived.[15]

Advance planning can involve a range of specific preparations. These might include arranging exit strategies in case of danger, establishing code words to alert others to danger, and maintaining communications with those outside the field site who can monitor one's safety.[16] (On a somewhat morbid note, Patrick Coy suggests planning can include making out a last will and testament before departing for the field.[17]) Arranging for trusted people to introduce one to the field site is a useful technique for establishing what Terry Williams and others call a researcher "safety zone."[18] Where possible, researchers may "scope out" research locations in advance, to anticipate safety issues such as ease of entry and egress, to assess the availability of public lighting and parking, and to avoid wandering aimlessly down unfamiliar streets.[19] M. Adams suggests role-playing potential safety risks in trial runs and checking interview guides carefully for possibly provocative questions.[20] These ideas are anticipated by Jeffrey Sluka, who above all emphasizes the importance of honesty in fieldwork and researcher self-presentation; fieldwork planning, he says, should include "recognizing how people are likely to define you, avoiding acting in ways that might reinforce these suspicions, and being as honest and straightforward as possible about who you really are and what you are really doing."[21] This pertains to my next suggestion for researcher safety, which entails contextualizing the researcher's presence at a site.

Contextualization

In many places where qualitative researchers work, people are unfamiliar with the idea of a disinterested social science. As mentioned above, any experience they may have at all of social science research is usually in the service of some kind of official enterprise, like tax assessment. In a context characterized by violence, local people may be especially suspicious of unfamiliar people coming around asking questions and seeking information about the intimate details of their behaviors and beliefs.

This pervasive suspicion in itself poses a danger, not only to research, but also to researchers' health and safety. People in violent areas who have no conception of social science research may imagine other, more nefarious purposes for the outsider's presence in their neighborhood and act violently themselves to head these off. Researchers in rural parts of the Andes, like other foreigners, may be seen as *pishtacos* or *likisiris*—malevolent entities come to steal the fat (*grasa*) from the bodies of unsuspecting peasants for export and sale in North America.[22] In both rural and urban areas of Bolivia, Mexico, Guatemala, and elsewhere, researchers might be mistaken for thieves, rapists, or other "antisocial" elements and fall victim to the vigilantes who sometimes lynch criminal suspects they apprehend in their neighborhoods.[23]

In short, with no clear understanding of the context in which strangers are to be perceived, local people can speculate and attribute treacherous motives to unknown persons. Violence begets insecurity and suspicion, which in turn beget further violence, and some of it may be aimed at the person whose activities in the area conform to no recognized category.

It is therefore imperative that qualitative researchers contextualize themselves and their research for the people and communities in which they will be working.[24] The local people themselves engage in self-contextualization every time they find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. Work, study, or social engagements often require them to move through different settings, where they may encounter suspicion about themselves and their motivations. Where I work in Cochabamba, young men visiting their girlfriends in a neighboring *barrio*, taxi drivers dropping off a fare, tourists from other cities who take the wrong bus and get off at the wrong stop—all have been victims of vigilante lynching in recent years, when they were mistaken for thieves by suspicious *barrio* residents.[25] As "ethnographers" of violence alert to con-

textual cues, researchers should pay attention to their surroundings and cultivate their own mental maps of safer and more dangerous places. They can then more easily avoid places where they are not well known, or go in the company of locally recognized guides who can provide others with the necessary contextualization. Creating this map can be part of the research itself, as the researcher assembles it in conversations and interactions with local people.

Whether local people are entirely unfamiliar with qualitative research or have negative associations with it due to the use of similar techniques by government agents and other actors, academic researchers must clearly and frequently explain their purposes. The people need to be shown how research activities contribute to the realization of a project's goals; researchers whose projects have applied or activist dimensions can emphasize the contributions they will make to resolving local problems. This contextualizing may require helping local people understand the nature of research itself, and the ways in which particular methods (interviewing, for example) produce data that address research questions. One way of doing this is to develop an oral script the researcher can recite, using nontechnical language, each and every time someone new is encountered in the study site. With time, one can hope news about the researcher and his or her activities will spread, and word of mouth will take over the work of contextualization. But even after many months, one should not be surprised to discover that one's research activities are still the source of speculation and occasional *desconfianza* among local people. Again, this can only be countered by the researcher's active and repeated self-contextualization, to dispel rumors that arise concerning his or her purposes in the area.

Alertness

Keeping alert is one of the principal techniques researchers can learn from their subjects. In a highly violent context, people expect violence at any moment. One technique they employ for avoiding danger is to maintain a state of steady watchfulness.[26] In some settings, as mentioned above, people are continually on the lookout for the unknown, unfamiliar, and potentially dangerous. In others, they are very well aware of the sources of danger—the police, for example, or gang members—and they keep a constant watch for the arrival of these violent elements in their localities. Learning to see like a local is a key component of becoming an "ethnographer" of personal safety.

Qualitative research often requires the researcher to be present for long periods of time in a local setting, exposed to the same dangers local residents face. Like them, the researcher can adopt a stance of watchfulness, remaining alert to possible dangers as they appear. Just as locals may call on neighbors to watch their houses when they have to leave them unattended, researchers can employ field assistants to keep watch over their possessions and persons while they are working.[27] In Cochabamba, while I did research in the huge outdoor market called the Cancha (frequently the site of violent crime), my friend and assistant Nacho literally watched my back, following me through the crowded marketplace to ensure I was not the target of criminal intent. (It helped that Nacho is physically imposing and a master of the martial arts.) Maintaining alertness may be easy to do at first, but it can become more difficult with time and experience, as the researcher becomes more familiar with the local environment and a kind of complacency begins to set in. Researchers should remember that violent places are by definition unpredictable, and they must continually remind themselves to pay attention to what is going on around them.

Alertness to threatening behaviors in personal interaction can also enhance researcher safety. Paterson, Gregory, and Thorne identify such cues as over-familiarity, hugging and other inappropriate physical contact, pacing, agitation, and challenging speech as warning signs that the informant may be unsteady or dangerous. They suggest the researcher ask permission to make a quick phone call to an outside ally and use a predetermined code phrase to signal the need for assistance.[28]

It is worth noting that this technique of alert watchfulness will not only help keep researchers safe but can contribute to the quality of their research as well. Being alert to detail is a basic technique of qualitative research, as is cultivating "explicit awareness" of what might otherwise be taken for granted.[29] As researchers learn to be alert to changes in the local environment that may signal impending danger, they will also become more attentive to other details that will enrich their information gathering. A willingness to live or work amid the same dangers as one's informants can also raise a researcher's local standing, as well as provide him or her with a more proximate grasp of the lives of those who live with violence or even, on occasion, practice it.[30]

Interviewing

The general atmosphere of suspicion in highly violent areas can have an influence on the interview process, shaping the kinds of questions researchers can ask and the strategies they must adopt in conducting interviews. This may be the case especially when violence—its causes and consequences—is the explicit topic of investigation. Questions about domestic violence, for example, may be rebuffed by people who sense an implicit accusation; just asking certain questions can terminate a previously friendly and productive relationship. Inquiries about the state, gangs, or illegal activities may produce similarly negative or even hostile responses.

Interviewing in violent or dangerous contexts requires patience and subtlety. Researchers should take into account the inherent danger of a particular area when designing their research plans. For example, semi-structured interview schedules may be more appropriate than strictly structured guides, as the former allow the questioner more flexibility to shape the questions to the particular interview context. An interviewer may wish to allow the interviewee to broach particularly sensitive issues, so as not to offend the individual with a direct and possibly offensive question. If the research participant appears to become uncomfortable in the course of the interview, or expresses a reluctance to answer certain questions, the interviewer can cut the interview short and propose to return for a follow-up on another occasion.

Such semi-structured techniques undoubtedly require more time than structured interviews, which pose direct questions driven entirely by the academic goals of the project. The researcher may feel impatient, unwilling to use indirect questioning for fear another chance to interview a particular person will not arise. But in violent contexts direct questioning can backfire, alarming the interviewee and resulting in more delays and problems. The interviewer cannot force things that go against the grain of local decorum and common sense. Again, the "ethnographer" of violence, in whatever discipline, should follow the lead of local interlocutors, learning from them which topics are more easily raised and which are more problematic, who in the community is more likely to be offended by particular topics, and so on.

Other structural elements of individual identity that may affect how questions are received include gender, race, and social class, with some kinds of people more open to particular types of questions than others. Effective

approaches for engaging interview subjects can be gleaned through infor-mal interactions and participant observation, as the researcher learns local norms and then feeds them back into the interview context through an iter-ative research design. The interview from this perspective is an extension of participant observation, a more formal kind of conversation that occurs in the context of an ongoing relationship between interviewer and interviewee. As in other kinds of relationships, this one will strengthen with time, and the range of issues that can be raised will eventually expand.

When deciding where to conduct a particular interview, it is often best, as is sometimes said, to "let the informant lead." An informant who feels more comfortable in a particular setting will more likely be put at ease there, re-sulting in a better, more detailed interview. The researcher must again be alert to any danger signals present in a particular setting, however. If pos-sible, he or she can try to visit the site beforehand to assess problems that may arise and decide if the situation poses any unusual safety concerns. With some informants (for example, those known to be involved in violent or dangerous activities), choosing a public place for an interview may be in the researcher's best interests, even if it puts the informant somewhat on guard. Interviews with government authorities, police officers, and other public officials will most likely be conducted in a place of the informant's choosing, typically an office or other formal space; residents of poor neigh-borhoods, in contrast, may be more flexible in determining the location.

With regard to sampling, researchers in violent contexts may want to rely on purposive or snowball sampling to identify potential informants.[31] Given the many challenges researchers face in recruiting subjects who may be involved in illegal activities, using a kind of "network sampling" that asks previous subjects to recommend subsequent ones may be more cost effec-tive and ultimately more successful than other kinds of recruitment mech-anisms. Providing modest payments to interview subjects is also an impor-tant technique in contexts where the idea of "doing something for nothing is anathema" to the people being interviewed.[32]

In all cases, determining the validity of information gained through quali-tative interviewing is a challenge for any researcher, particularly in violent and dangerous contexts. In such settings, where they may fear some sort of negative outcome for themselves, informants may be more likely to limit the kinds of information they are willing to impart, or even lie outright in response to particular questions. While the validity of qualitative data may

be impossible to measure precisely, it is most likely to be higher when the informant feels comfortable with the researcher, with the setting of the interview, and with the questions being asked. Again, such things can be determined in advance by the researcher who is willing to spend the time and effort to cultivate good relationships in a local setting prior to initiating formal interviewing. Becoming locally known and trusted, establishing context for one's activities, and allowing the informant some say in where and how the interview occurs are all strategies for improving data quality and limiting risks to both interviewer and interview subject.

Equipment

In impoverished areas where violence is often endemic, an apparently "wealthy" stranger arriving to do research will attract immediate attention, from both friendly and less hospitable eyes. One's clothing, shoes, jewelry, accessories, and equipment will likely call attention to oneself as a person of means (even if those means are based on soft money) and make one the possible focus of criminal intent. Researchers should again follow the local lead, dressing in simple clothes and avoiding any overt displays of wealth[33]—a common practice among researchers in generally poor areas where people nevertheless have different and unequal degrees of prosperity. The most basic of gear should be chosen to avoid attracting undue attention. This is not always easy: during my first fieldwork in Bolivia I was interrogated extensively by local people fascinated by my backpack, which to me seemed quite ordinary but to my interlocutors was something fancy and unfamiliar. Equipment used for purposes of note taking, audio recording, photography, and videography should likewise be of the most basic kind, to prevent against loss should the gear be stolen and to avoid calling attention to one's own relative affluence. Smaller equipment is better than larger equipment—a lapel or lavaliere microphone, for example, is less obtrusive than other kinds of recording devices, and so less likely to make people uncomfortable or to call attention to itself.

A cell phone is perhaps an obvious but nevertheless essential safety tool in the field, as is a "dummy wallet" to protect one's valuables. Elizabeth Kenyon and Sheila Hawker even suggest researchers be equipped with a personal alarm to sound in case of danger.[34] A credit card is another important piece of "equipment"—as Sluka has pointed out, it can enable the researcher to make a quick exit from a dangerous situation.[35]

Confidentiality

In the United States, every university-based researcher setting off to do fieldwork must endure the crucible known as the IRB, the Institutional Review Board, which polices all university research to protect human subjects from possible harm caused by it. Typically, the IRB is constituted of university faculty members, who review all proposed research to assess any risks to informants that may arise (and so, in turn, protect the university from any resulting lawsuits). The IRB has its uses, but in highly violent contexts the qualitative researcher must go to even greater lengths to protect subjects from possible repercussions.[36] Pseudonyms must obviously be used to disguise individual identities, but researchers should also change any other information that might connect a particular person to the research. Sometimes a researcher must balance an individual's desire for notoriety against the possible harm that could come to that person by being identified in print and should carefully explain that balance to the informant.

Researchers may also consider using pseudonyms to disguise the identities of places in which they conduct research to prevent their published findings from having consequences (from the state, perhaps) for people living in a particular area. Oral consent scripts are a good alternative to signed consent forms, especially in contexts where the form itself would be the only object linking the informant to the data. Indeed, IRBs that sometimes insist on the written consent form as an instrument to guarantee informant safety may need to be educated by researchers about the potentially compromising nature of the document. (And incidentally, IRB informed consent documents may, if not carefully constructed, offend local sensibilities by directly addressing extremely sensitive subjects at too early a point in the interview or in too direct a way, causing informants precisely the kind of stress such documents are intended to avert.)

Other precautions also allow the researcher to do research with confidence and help interlocutors to feel confident themselves that their participation will not harm them in any way. David Langford suggests that when informants are compensated for giving interviews, the payments should be made in cash to prevent the establishment of any possible connections to the research.[37] During fieldwork, data should be password protected and stored on a nonlocal computer. In some cases, the possibility of data being compromised is so serious that the researcher is advised against any kind of note taking or data recording. In such contexts, a good memory is an in-

valuable tool. As Kovats-Bernat observes, "We must remind ourselves daily that some of the things that we jot down can mean harassment, imprisonment, exile, torture, or death for our informants or for ourselves and take our notes accordingly."[38]

CONCLUSION

What defines a particular research context as "highly violent"? In many if not most places in Latin America, as elsewhere around the world, violence is exceedingly difficult to measure. Especially in cities, where the majority of violent events occur, distrust of authorities often means that many victims decline to report crimes. These same authorities keep poor records, making quantification of crime or violence challenging, if not impossible. Additionally, perception often fails to correspond to reality. Perceptions of areas as "violent" or "dangerous" may be based on racial or class categories that form part of larger structures of discrimination within the national society. Poor neighborhoods, in other words, may be considered violent or dangerous simply because they are poor. The media sensationalize violence, inflating the significance of violent incidents and attributing to particular areas public reputations for violence that can be remarkably durable. As Teresa Caldeira has shown, local "talk of crime"—gossip, rumor, stories, and the like—can also contribute to the perception of danger in a given area, further enhancing reputations that have little basis in reality.[39] The resulting picture may be epistemically "murky," and ascertaining risk and determining how to respond to it intrinsically difficult.[40]

Amid such ambiguity, a qualitative researcher quite possibly will have no real idea of exactly how violent or dangerous a particular field site might be. But here again, researchers would do well to heed the suggestion that whatever their disciplinary training and approach, while doing fieldwork they also become "ethnographers" of violence. In doing so, they can skip over the knotty question of empirical levels of violence and focus instead on the lived experience of the people who are the focus of their research. If people fear violence and consider it a tangible element of their daily realities, then the researcher is well advised to pay attention to how they cope with this ever-present menace. The strategies local people have developed to avoid and manage quotidian violence present options for how to organize one's own behavior so as to keep safe while conducting effective and productive social research.

NOTES

1. M. Bloor, B. Fincham, and H. Sampson, *Qualiti (NCRM) Commissioned Inquiry into the Risks to Well-Being of Researchers in Qualitative Research* (Cardiff: Economic and Social Research Council, 2007), 22. For the results of a survey on perceived risks to public health researchers, see Virginia Dickson-Swift, Erica L. James, Sandra Kippen, and Pranee Liamputtong, "Risk to Researchers in Qualitative Research on Sensitive Topics: Issues and Strategies," *Qualitative Health Research* 18, no. 1 (2008): 133–44.

2. Hannah E. Gill, "Finding a Middle Ground between Extremes: Notes on Researching Transnational Crime and Violence," *Anthropology Matters* 6, no. 2 (2004), http://www.anthropologymatters.com/journal/2004-2/index.html (accessed March 14, 2013).

3. See, for example, Antonio C. La Pastina, "The Implications of an Ethnographer's Sexuality," *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 4 (2006): 724–35.

4. Amanda Coffey, *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity* (London: SAGE, 1999); Nancy Howell, *Surviving Fieldwork: A Report of the Advisory Panel on Health and Safety in Fieldwork* (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1990).

5. Jennifer K. Wesely, "Negotiating Myself: The Impact of Studying Female Exotic Dancers on a Feminist Researcher," *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (2006): 146–62.

6. Eva Moreno, "Rape in the Field: Reflections from a Survivor," in *Taboo: Sex, Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork*, ed. Don Kulick and Margaret Willson, 166–89 (London: Routledge, 1995). Gender-related risks, as Bloor and others point out, are extensive and can exacerbate the more general risks faced by male researchers. Bloor and colleagues (citing older work by Stanko) observe that sexual harassment is ubiquitous in the field, heightening female researchers' sense of vulnerability and risk. Others, however (for example, Paterson and others), have noted that in some circumstances, men can be at greater risk than women—if, for example, local men perceive them as sexual predators or romantic rivals. Bloor et al., *Qualiti (NCRM) Commissioned Inquiry into the Risks*; Elizabeth A. Stanko, "Intimidating Education: Sexual Harassment in Criminology," *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 3, no. 2 (1992): 331–40; Barbara L. Paterson, David Gregory, and Sally Thorne, "A Protocol for Researcher Safety," *Qualitative Health Research* 9, no. 2 (1999): 259–69.

7. Peter Andreas, *Blue Helmets, Black Markets: The Business of Survival in the Siege of Sarajevo* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Andrew Goldsmith, "Fear, Fumbling and Frustration: Reflections on Doing Criminological Fieldwork in Colombia," *Criminal Justice* 3 (2003): 103–25; Carolyn Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

8. Konstantin Belousov, Tom Horlick-Jones, Michael Bloor, Yakov Gilinsky, Valentin Golbert, Yakov Kostikovsky, Michael Levi, and Dmitri Pentsov, "Any Port in a Storm: Fieldwork Difficulties in Dangerous and Crisis-Ridden Settings," *Qualitative Research* 7 (2007): 155–75; Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben, eds., *Fieldwork under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Jeffrey

Sluka, "Participant Observation in Violent Social Contexts," *Human Organization* 49, no. 2 (1990): 114–26.

9. Daniel M. Goldstein, *The Spectacular City: Violence and Performance in Urban Bolivia*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

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12. J. Christopher Kovats-Bernat, "Negotiating Dangerous Fields: Pragmatic Strategies for Fieldwork amid Violence and Terror," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 1 (2002): 210.

13. Paterson et al., "A Protocol for Researcher Safety."

14. Howell, *Surviving Fieldwork*.

15. See also Evelyn R. Hayes, Shirley V. Carter, Mary C. Carroll, and Karen H. Morin, "Managing Fear Associated with Nursing in Urban Environments: First Steps," *Public Health Nursing* 13, no. 2 (1996): 90–96.

16. Howell, *Surviving Fieldwork*; Helen Sampson and Michelle Thomas, "Lone Researchers at Sea: Gender, Risk and Responsibility," *Qualitative Research* 3, no. 2 (2003): 165–89.

17. Patrick G. Coy, "Shared Risks and Research Dilemmas on a Peace Brigades International Team in Sri Lanka," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 30, no. 5 (2001): 575–606.

18. Terry Williams, Eloise Dunlap, Bruce D. Johnson, and Ansley Hamid, "Personal Safety in Dangerous Places," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 21, no. 3 (1992): 347. The authors define the safety zone both psychologically (e.g., as a space in which the researcher should not feel endangered) and physically; the safety zone, they say, is "a physical area extending a few feet around the researcher in which researchers and others within this area feel comfortable" (356).

19. Jacqueline A. Nadwairski, "Inner-City Safety for Home Care Providers," *Journal of Nursing Administration* 22, no. 9 (1992): 42–47; Paterson et al., "A Protocol for Researcher Safety."

20. M. Adams, "Researcher Safety and Participatory Research," paper presented at the "Participatory Ethics for Human Geography" stream at the RGS/IBG conference, London, August 3-September 1, 2006; cited in Bloor, Fincham, and Sampson, *Qualiti (NCRM) Commissioned Inquiry into the Risks to Well-Being of Researchers*, 24.

21. Sluka, "Participant Observation in Violent Social Contexts," 121.

22. Mary Weismantel, *Cholas and Pishtacos: Stories of Race and Sex in the Andes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). In 2000, a Japanese tourist and a Guatemalan bus driver were murdered in the village of Todos Santos Cuchumatan when they were mistaken for kidnappers intent on stealing local babies for foreign adoption. Jim Handy, "Chicken Thieves, Witches, and Judges: Vigilante Justice and Customary Law in Guatemala," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 36 (2004): 533–61. Goldsmith calls attention to the physical differences between researchers and subjects that can sometimes lead to insecurity, which he calls the "*gringo* factor." Goldsmith, "Fear, Fumbling, and Frustration," 108.

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