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# **“You shouldn’t be seen talking to them !”**

Accidental frontlines, building trust and coping with danger

**Eva Riedke**



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***“You shouldn’t be seen talking to them!”***

***Accidental frontlines, building trust and coping with danger \****

Eva RIEDKE

**Abstract:** Close to Durban, South Africa, a group of township residents protested against the allocation of houses in a local development project and the alleged scale of corruption therein. The group soon faced severe threats and intimidations by the governing elite and as these tensions intensified, my research was transformed into a form of “accidental frontline anthropology”. While unravelling the tensions between the different local actors involved promised invaluable insights into local political culture, the dilemmas of maintaining pre-existing social relationships on both sides of the conflict were also evident: I needed to counter critical suspicions about my past and present work in the township, engaging in conscious impression management. The paper explores the question of how we are compelled to adjust our practices in the field, when grappling with situations of doubt, vexing uncertainty and disorientation. It explores the development of a series of pragmatic, improvised field strategies, addressing in particular the (re-) establishment of neutrality and trust, the changing power dynamics that underlie researcher-participant relationships, the predominance of rumours in contexts of conflict and the complex dialectic of empathy and detachment. The argument is made that reflexive attention to the dynamics of ethnographic discomforts renders visible their practical and heuristic worth.

**Keywords:** fieldwork, conflict, neutrality, trust, power relations, heuristics.

**Résumé :** A proximité de Durban (Afrique du Sud), les habitants d’une cité se sont mobilisés pour protester contre un projet d’aménagement urbain, dénonçant comme corrompu le mode d’attribution des maisons. Ils ont rapidement été confrontés à des menaces et des intimidations des élites. Ces tensions s’intensifiaient, ma recherche est devenue, par accident, une « anthropologie de première ligne ». L’analyse des tensions entre les différents acteurs locaux a jeté un éclairage original sur la culture politique locale. J’étais néanmoins confrontée au dilemme de maintenir ou non les liens établis préalablement de part et d’autre de la ligne de fracture. Je devais faire face aux suspicions sur mes recherches, présentes et passées, en recourant consciemment à une « gestion de l’impression ». Cet article étudie la manière dont on ajuste ses pratiques sur le terrain lorsqu’on fait face à des situations de doute, d’incertitude et de désorientation. Il analyse une série de stratégies improvisées pragmatiquement, notamment pour (r)établir la neutralité et la confiance ; l’évolution des rapports de pouvoir entre le chercheur et ses hôtes ; la force des rumeurs dans les contextes de conflit ; la dialectique complexe de l’empathie et du détachement. Envisagé d’un point de vue réflexif, l’inconfort de l’ethnographe présente une certaine plus-value tant sur le plan pratique qu’heuristique.

**Mots-clés :** terrain ethnographique, conflit, neutralité, confiance, relations de pouvoir, heuristique.

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Somewhere close to the city of Durban, I was spending the late afternoon sometime in early 2013 in the office of Councillor Khumalo, a ward councillor and the man “in charge” in the township where I had been working for the past nine months doing ethnographic research on local political culture<sup>1</sup>. We hadn’t seen each other for a while as he had repeatedly agreed to meet, however always cancelled our appointment at short notice. The political climate had changed in the past few weeks and for the first time in a meeting with him, I observed myself becoming visibly nervous. Also, from his side, there wasn’t the usual informal banter. Instead, his reserved, earnest tone and gesture made clear that today we would need to talk some “serious business.” The past few weeks had taken a toll on him as existing tensions around a local housing development project had dramatically heightened. A former *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) soldier, whom the councillor knew well, was murdered and rumours implicated the latter in what was deemed to have been a contract killing.

Fuelling my unease during our meeting was the fact that I did not want to ask incriminating questions by laying on the table the many rumours that I had been confronted with during my daily fieldwork realities. I asked myself: should I instead pretend not to have heard the allegations or not to have read the newspaper? He sat behind his desk, not paying me much attention, filing and re-filing a stack of papers a series of times. To stop him from picking up another stack, I said to him: “Things have changed here lately, and I want to ask you, do you approve of me continuing my research the way I have been?” He did not respond immediately, moved a used tea cup from one corner of the desk to the other. He then said with a sigh in his voice, “Yes! It is fine! You can continue!” My sense was that this was a half-hearted reply he didn’t quite agree with. He sought to change the topic and began to tell me a different story; “You know, everything has been going well lately! We have been able to deal with some thorn issues, you know?” He paused and continued, “Did you know that I was attacked three weeks ago, in my house, and shot at? [PAUSE] Shot at!? At close range!? I was shot at three times!” I hadn’t heard about the incident and responded accordingly. The councillor, now continuing, provided his interpretation that a drug dealer who lives beside his house must have orchestrated the crime. I asked why, and here he responded; “Well, I think it is because I am a threat to him. I mean, *you*, you know this, I am the councillor!”

While I shall return to my reflections of this meeting with Councillor Khumalo, I will start this paper by illustrating first how the political climate in the township had changed from a context of relative peace to one in which violence, threats and the pervasion of fear became part of my daily fieldwork reality. Secondly, I will explore how my existing social relationships were transformed through the development of a ‘dangerous field’ (Kovats-Bernat, 2002) and considerably put to the test. Thirdly, I will reflect upon how the prevalence of violence modified my approach in the field - i.e. influencing *how* I met people, *where* we met, and *what* role I as an anthropologist took during such meetings.

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1 In this account, I have taken care to change the names and to not make explicit the place where I conducted my research.

## Emergence of a “dangerous field”

On the eastern border of the township, a housing development project was being carried out in late 2012 under the administration of Councillor Khulamalo. The objective of the project was to provide new, fully state-funded houses for residents who lived in heavily deteriorated houses, or for families whose immediate members could no longer be accommodated in a single house. A list was established by the councillor's office, listing heads of households that were to receive a new house. As work on the construction sites begun, a series of disputes arose between the community members and those responsible for the housing project on matters of a) where houses were to be built – and whether, for reasons of land shortage, houses could in fact be built in peoples' existing compounds; b) over the protection of graves in people's yards; as well as c) whether old houses could be pulled down before new ones were built. When the first houses were finished, tensions intensified as people were seen moving into the new houses who were not from the local community. Accusations were levelled that the councillor had financially profited from replacing existing names on the housing list with a series of new names. Angered residents, in turn, sought support from a prominent shack-dwellers' movement and geared their efforts towards making transparent the dynamics of political meddling and corruption that had taken place. Tensions eventually transformed into an outright conflict when a so-called “outsider” – living in one of the new houses – was killed. The victim was a former *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) soldier, who had allegedly been “deployed” to the new houses, by the councillor, to ensure safety.

From the time the first man was killed – followed by a series of “hitmen murders” in the months thereafter – I became caught, to borrow a term coined by Pieke (1995), in a case of “*accidental* frontline anthropology.” The “frontline” emerged around me and affected my existing social relationships, it led to new interpretations of my objectives and my past work in the township, placed my fieldwork and myself in danger, and it drew many of my own ethical certainties into question. In the early stages of my research, I had established good relationships with the local political leaders including Councillor Khumalo, had taken part in local meetings of the African National Congress (ANC), had come to know officers at the township police station, members of the Community Police Forum (CPF), and representatives of local nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). Some of these individuals were now considered to be the perpetrators of violence. Nevertheless, they also remained formal and informal ‘gatekeepers’ and were in a position to easily derail my ‘access’ in the field. As the conflict unravelled, I was for this reason compelled to continue meeting these individuals on a regular basis while I simultaneously could not renege my existing relationships and my commitment to those township residents who had now turned against Councillor Khumalo and his “crew” – as the councillor's local allies were soon referred to.

The protesters repeatedly reported on threats and intimidations being carried out at night. Cars were said to drive around particular sections of the township with their full-beam headlights on, before then parking in front of individual houses for prolonged hours. As Vincent, one of the protesters, described such an incident;

*Every night they are intimidating us. After the protest last week, one man was followed by the councillor and his crew. They went to his house at night with*

*a bakkie [pickup truck] full of guns and petrol bombs and told him “You see! during the day you were always with people, but at night you are alone. You see who I am with. I can take you on. So don’t get involved with things that don’t concern you!”*

I made it a policy to leave the township before it got dark, feeling protected by a sense of urban anonymity. During the day, I initially continued my research unchanged, however, my work and my presence soon began to gain new forms of critical attention. On one occasion, during an informal conversation in a supermarket, a middle-aged man said to a woman I was with; “Do you know who she is? You really shouldn’t be seen talking to her!” before then walking out again. During a funeral I attended a week later, one of the local ANC party representatives greeted the guests, saying to the audience in *isiZulu*, “While we are here to bid our dear comrade farewell, we must be careful what we say. We all know that today we have a spy amongst us.”

## The “impartial gaze” questioned

Whether “a test”<sup>2</sup> or a deliberate form of intimidation, the two incidences pointed to the fact that my engagement among the different parties in conflict had put me in a situation where a number of people were no longer certain who I really was and what I was really doing, or more specifically, on which “side” of the conflict my loyalties at this stage lay. In meetings with the protesters, individuals began wanting to share “proof” that they had been collecting such as the original housing lists, conversations they had recorded on the cell phones, emails they had secretly copied, as well as photographs they had taken. I never accepted these as I feared it could jeopardise my own safety, that of my assistant, and potentially even theirs. For similar reasons, I became more sensitive about my own ethnographic data – I stopped writing down names, I never kept more than one day of fieldnotes on me, repeatedly changed my notebooks, relied heavily on abbreviations, and deliberately ‘roughed up’ my handwriting. I turned offers for “proof” down on a number of occasions and explained that I needed to remain somewhat “neutral”. Such expressions were rarely successful however and in the situation – as well as for my own sense of ethics – it seemed inadequate to merely share their vital concerns and to provide assurance that I sympathised with their situation. As Glazer (1970: 314) has pointed out, “in times of heightened group antagonism, there is little room for neutrality.” In my case, the more I professed neutrality, the more adamant the protesters attempted to persuade me to accept their accounts as the only correct version.

With a copy shop owner named Themba, with whom I shared a close friendship, I reflected on some of these difficulties that I encountered with the protesters, particularly the hard-to-find balance between expressing sincere empathy but at the same time

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2 The aim could have been to “test” (amongst others); a) my willpower to pursue my research even when circumstances became difficult, b) my ability to accurately “read” hazardous situations, c) to see how I responded in such contexts – for instance, would I go to the police to seek security or would such threats effectively pressure me into only associating with one faction of the conflict? As Sluka (1990) and Dowler (2000) suggest, accusations of “being a spy” may in some instances speak more to dimensions of rapport and conscious impression management than to the true perils and dangers of one’s research topic.

avoiding forms of complicity that may be more suggestive of partisan anthropology. Themba, in turn, provided invaluable clarity on a few banalities of my daily doings. He made clear that on a daily basis, I spoke to different parties of the conflict, however rarely devoted a full day to only one side. As divisions had become more pronounced over the course of a few weeks, my day-to-day "visibility" in the township had progressively also become more significant. Themba for instance pointed out that the office of an influential NGO representative (aligned to the councillor) was located next door to one of the protesters' homes. On occasions when I met one, I had – without deliberately considering how others might now perceive this – also taken the opportunity to visit the other. In addition, he suggested that according to his recollections, few people in the township had experience with researchers. I was according to Themba readily identified as "something like a journalist." He explained the conundrum in that I was ascribed the identity of someone who a) always has "very little time for very many questions," b) knows to "play tricks with questions," c) is difficult to judge in terms of "who she will later write for," but who d) nevertheless could, if effectively "won over," be instrumental in making the political wrong-doings of the township transparent for the world to see.

With the group of protesters, I had also established fieldwork relationships prior to the unfolding of the conflict. The fact that through their entanglement in the housing development project, my research endeavour was now ascribed new meanings and significance may in part be explainable through the very nature and experience of violence itself. Feldman (1991) speaks the "formative" dimension of violence, taken to mean that it "shapes people's perceptions of who they are what they are fighting for across time and spaces – a continual dynamic that forges as well as affects identities" (Robben and Nordstrom, 1995: 4). For the protesters, simply writing a book "to bear witness" no longer served its ends (Mahmood, 2002: 10). According to Themba, I needed to amend my social placement in the field, and the most direct step would be "devoting more time towards just being around" and, highlighting the significance of performativity, also "asking fewer questions."

In response to Themba's advice, I sought to radically "(re-) informalise" my meetings with the protesters. I no longer recorded our conversations, I no longer took notes and what had previously been semi-structured interviews (usually on a one-to-one basis) now became regular meetings in which I would spend one afternoon a week at one of the protesters' homes. I regularly brought biscuits, drinks and other groceries with me, as more so than before, I now saw it as a privilege of being welcome. During such afternoons, whoever was inclined to see me would come. My regular presence normalised to the degree that in a few instances I sat quietly just observing, rather than actively engaging, in the situations that unfolded and the communicative actions and interpretations that were carried out. While paradoxically still an arranged meeting, I once again gained access to more mundane processes of daily life and had the ability to unpack from a different vantage point, dynamics of interaction, "speech events" (Duranti, 1994) and more generally the protesters' situational experiences of the conflict. While everyone present was aware of my research project, the avoidance of a "classical" interview context served - for the time being - to peripheralise my agenda within day-to-day social interaction. My presence temporarily became more passive and my role more ambiguous.

In moments when the sense of crisis was particularly acute however, I was asked to give advice on additional avenues that the group may pursue. When a few members were beaten up and arrested following a protest march, I was asked to elaborate on the pros and cons of continuing to pursue particular demands through the municipality, the head of the police, the chief and/or the shack dwellers movement. I was also frequently asked to ‘make sense’ of situations. Interested in my insights into the conflict dynamics, they posed questions such as “why do you think x, y and z happened this way?” While I feared that by providing some answers, I was weakening any vantage point of neutral, uninvolved observation, I equally felt that it was only through such ‘bargains of neutrality’ that the protesters could see the re-establishment of good rapport as an empowerment, or more frankly, as in some manner also serving their ends.

In the time that followed the meeting I sketched out above, Councillor Khumalo had in turn also developed suspicions of his own about my research. He pointed out on one occasion that he had seen my car parked outside one of the protesters’ homes and asked; “what did you do there? What unfounded claims did these people make?” I assumed that he was concerned about what information I had received, “whose side I was on” and whether I would in some way cause him harm. Similar to the protesters, I now also proposed to meet on a regular routine basis, on one particular day every week. During our meetings, I generally sought to divert from a classical semi-structured interview style, consciously attempting to create space for mere “conversation”. Already then, I recognised it as my own ethnographic fable that I was hereby effectively establishing a sense of being “agenda-less” – yet at the same time, it seemed to be one of the very few feasible means of re-establishing good rapport.

The councillor, while agreeing to a regular meeting, hardly ever stuck to the time he had pencilled into his schedule. He kept me waiting in his office week after week. This, in turn, opened an avenue for observation techniques, which in their classical sense had increasingly become difficult to “simply do.” Sitting around in a given place (as for instance, the councillor’s office) without an appointment or discernible purpose, was prior to such routines, likely to fuel critical suspicions. While I initially began to doubt their “efficacy,” the regular appointments increasingly allowed me to observe those that would “hang around” his office and the local ANC headquarter. I was most likely seen by some simply as “the woman that always sits there on Tuesdays to wait.” In my eyes a less favourable implication was that during the ‘unstructured’ conversations that took place once we did meet, I felt entrapped in a prior-to-then inexperienced form of situational passivity. I followed the councillor’s narrations and the themes he set, which at times seemed hopelessly superficial and which above all, frequently left me wondering what relevance some of the issues we explored had for my research (a point I shall return to in the end).

## **Power relations transformed**

In conversation on both sides of the conflict, I frequently began to ask the question: “what is dangerous for me at this point? And why?” The answers provided insights into potentially hazardous situations, but also elicited commentaries on the “fault lines” of the conflict. From a methodological perspective, I was asking where I could go and where I couldn’t go, what I could do and what I shouldn’t do. In addition, I considered that



asking formal and informal gatekeepers this very question, might invoke amongst them a sense of “responsibility” for my safety. But the answers frequently took one beyond these concerns – inadvertently rendering visible the complexity of issues and positions. Themba for example highlighted that similar to me (a white, female, foreigner) the generation who had fought during the local liberation struggle and against the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in the 1980s and 1990s – insignificant on what side they stood on the present conflict – were out of the “firing line.” He said:

*They [the councillor and his ‘crew’] would never do anything serious to you, only maybe intimidate you to keep some things quiet. But you leave before it is dark, so it’s ok. It is like me, I can talk to most people and get involved in these problems, but because I was almost killed three times [during the ‘struggle years’], and so everyone here knows that, this for me is nothing but overtime.*

In the same conversation, he adds:

*Like me, you should not be secretive though. If you go and talk to these people, you should always park your car in front of their house – then they know “ok, she is talking to that and that person.*

The methodological rigour of such questions may in some cases be considerably limited, as by asking questions about *my* safety, I was at times eliciting hypothetical answers tailored to fit a situation that hardly ever mattered in this township – namely the safety of a white, female anthropologist. Nevertheless, the fact that for me this developed into a pragmatic field strategy in its own right, is illustrative of a general insight promulgated since the writing culture debate, namely that “the inequality of power relations, weighted in favour of the anthropologist” can hardly ever be presumed (Marcus, 1997: 98f). More specifically, with respect to research conducted in dangerous fields, circumstances specific thereto result in so-called “shifts in power” between the anthropologist and his/her interlocutors; becoming ever more prominent and dramatic (Kovats-Bernat, 2002). As Kovats-Bernat notes, one of the reasons is the need for a researcher to protect or safeguard their own well-being. He writes, “the anthropologist is more likely to rely on local knowledge and the protection extended by interlocutors or other locals” (*ibid*: 214). This includes the sharing of responsibility and the adoption of what he terms a “localised ethic.” Herein, the researcher “takes stock of the good advice and recommendations of the local population” who are seen as more capable of anticipating the full array of possible dangers. When, as in my case, fieldwork relations are also maintained to the alleged perpetrators of violence, one may add that the dimensions of power become loaded with an additional complexity. Power holders define the research terms against a backdrop of potential threats and intimidations and, hereby, the notion of gatekeepers having “an upper hand” (Harrington, 2003: 598) receives a whole new connotation. Conducting research on conflicting sides of one conflict, in my case, meant that questions of local safety were employed for fundamentally different reasons amongst different actors and that the co-option of a “localised ethic” largely depended the engagement with a “third party” such as individuals like Themba, who for unique combination of historical-political factors had remained on the sidelines.



## The conspiracy of rumours

Engaging with both sides of the conflict, I witnessed how individuals attempted to explain to themselves what was happening around them and how it affected their lives. However, few facts could be established at any point in time. As one man framed the many unknowns; “Why had the MK soldier really been deployed to the new houses? Why was Mr Khuzwayo, who had nothing to do with the houses, also killed?” Provisional understandings of what occurred were constructed and then recycled. Different parties in the conflict essentially functioned as ‘rumour mills’ with each producing and circulating rumours which from their perspective served to make sense of the situation (Robben and Nordstrom, 1995; Simons, 1995).

Rumours themselves are endowed *with*, and in their parts, also amalgamated *into* “narratological forms” (Feldman, 1995: 230) in which people and events thereby “stitch together what may well be correct facts but in so doing omit gaps, as if correlations can always eventually be linked by causal arrows, with the strength of detail then proving causality” (Simons, 1995: 50). I began to realise that it is into such narratological forms that the anthropologist also becomes scripted. I regularly found myself uncritically buying into the accounts that were presented to me, only to identify a few days later the puzzling contradictions that emerged through the conflicting nature of competing rumours. I, much like my interlocutors, wanted to establish the “facts” of what was happening. Time and time again, I bought into narratives due to their appearance as neat orderings of substantial, chronological facts – only to have my then-established insights discredited in another situation, in another conversation with another group of people.

## Critical detachment disarmed

While one is meant to establish good rapport and simultaneously practice a form of reflective detachment to objectify the data and gain an analytical insight, in such instances, I traded my critical stance as an observer for “an illusion of congeniality” with my interlocutors (Robben, 1995: 85). Robben (1995) argues that it lies in the nature of face-to-face encounters in conflict settings that researchers frequently become diverted, their critical gaze swayed. He points to the manner in which rhetoric readily becomes part of a subtle moulding of appearances, particularly when “interlocutors have great personal and political stakes in making the ethnographer adopt their interpretations” (*ibid.*: 84). In addition, it is the veil of authenticity that characterises immediate, personal accounts, the experiences of emotionality that accompany stories of violence (*ibid.*) and, as I would add, also the compelling nature of the underlying narrative constructions. The latter infuse accounts with an order, meaning and rationality that is otherwise difficult to find. My inhibition to ask overtly critical or incriminating questions – due to feelings of personal unease, or out of fear that this would break rapport – no doubt contributed even further to an “emotional allurements.”

Robben (*ibid.*: 83) terms the process that unfolds “ethnographic seduction,” and hereby means “those personal defences and social strategies” that lead the ethnographer

“away from an intended course”.<sup>3</sup> He explains further that “seduction can be intentional but also unconscious and can be compared to the ways in which filmmakers, stage directors, artists, or writers succeed in totally absorbing the attention of the audiences.” The pretence of having been told something profound, of having gained a real understanding’ stands at the core of ‘ethnographic seduction’, which, in turn, prevents us from recognising the value of a “*thick* conversation” (in Geertz’s sense of the term) that we have just witnessed (*ibid.*: 85).

In my aforementioned meeting with Councillor Khumalo, his account of having been “shot” ... “by a drug dealer” ... “who saw him as a threat,” made me feel like I was being told first hand about another crucial development of the conflict. Enwrapped in the encounter, I interpreted the conversation as recognition of trust and a sign of good rapport. However, in the coming days I heard numerous conflicting accounts of *what* had happened that night, and even more reasons for *why*. In hindsight, I recognised that I had succumbed to what Robben (1995: 85) has identified as a fundamental problem of ethnographic seduction, namely that feeling a subjective sense of authenticity. I never questioned that a drug dealer might have nothing to do with it, whether the councillor was employing symbolism to make an entirely different point, or indeed whether his narrative was intended to lure me away from the insights I had already gained through my research on the “other side.” Confronted like most anthropologists in dangerous fields with the construction and recycling of rumours, ‘seduction’ hereby prevented me from generally recognising the *thickness* of the conversation, and more particularly from recognising what Feldman (1995: 230) defines as the “prognostic” dimensions of rumours – namely the “culturally mediated sense of possibility, structural prediction, political tendency and symbolic projection” entailed therein.

## Conclusion

The emergence of instability, violence, and crisis during field research are no longer contexts that force anthropologists to simply pack up and go home, and indeed the study of conflict, and political violence has become established as a disciplinary subfield in its own right. In this respect, it is by no means surprising that in recent years, publications are progressively beginning to include methodologically reflective accounts on research in ‘dangerous fields’, which in their sum point to a series of different pragmatic, improvised field strategies that have been employed to navigate the hazards and threats witnessed in such contexts. Yet, as has been argued, such strategies are rarely systematically theorised and much less taught to students (Davies, 2010; Kovats-Bernat, 2002; Pettigrew *et al.*, 2004; Robben and Nordstrom, 1995). The pragmatic field strategies employed often sway from the tried and true methods of anthropological fieldwork and frequently diverge from the discipline’s conventional codes of ethics (Kovats-Bernat, 2002).

My research during this period of heightened conflict can be characterised as a context marked by doubt, deep-seated uncertainty, disorientation and one that brought about a series of “intellectual discomforts” (Fassin, 2008). On the one hand, I was

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3 The term is used exclusively in its neutral meaning of “being led astray unawares, not in its popular meaning of allurement and entrapment” (Robben, 1995: 83).

confronted with a moral dilemma, as I justified maintaining field relationships – investing time in weekly meetings – with those who were now framed as the alleged perpetrators of violence. I did so, primarily for the sake of maintaining “access” in the field. The power relations between my interlocutors and me underwent significant transformations as the conflict unfolded – limiting in a number of respects my sense of “control” over ethical decisions, over matters of safety and, most importantly, over the social realms in which I could acquire ethnographic insights.

In hindsight, the context was also one, that when reflexively re-evaluated, entailed “sensitising moments.” On the one hand, fully embracing situations of uncertainty, doubt and discomfort in a self-reflexive manner is of unquestionable practical worth in the immediate context of field research; rendering visible room for manoeuvre. On the other hand, beyond the immediacy of the experience, this form of reflexivity secures a heightened form of critical potential of the anthropological account at large. The dynamics that underlie situations of uncertainty constitute a heuristic device in their own right (Gros, 2010; Peritore, 1990). As opposed to seeing such situations as mere epistemological predicament, the heuristic value lies in the recognition that these form part of larger scale “disruptions,” “breakdowns” or “crises.” They essentially render visible a reflexive problematisation and scrutiny of normative background convictions as well as more generally the conflicting conceptions of order that exist (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Honneth, 2010). It is through such encounters – and particularly the manner in which initial rationales and existing truth claims are continuously discredited therein – that one comes into the crucial position of being able to “bear witness.” One attains an insight into the “not fitting” of narratives and knowledge of cause and implication that remains unavailable to a less integrated observer.

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