

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL | WORKING PAPERS

**“HOW WAS YOUR TRIP?”
SELF-CARE FOR RESEARCHERS WORKING
AND WRITING ON VIOLENCE**

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DRUGS, SECURITY AND DEMOCRACY PROGRAM
DSD WORKING PAPERS ON RESEARCH SECURITY: NO. 2

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Drugs, Security and Democracy (DSD) Program strives to create a stronger, more systematized knowledge base on drugs, security, and democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean; to build capacity—both institutional and individual—by supporting relevant research; and to encourage policy-relevant, evidence-based research that could lead to the development of alternatives to present-day drug policies. Support is provided for research across a variety of disciplines—anthropology, criminology, economics, history, international relations, journalism, legal studies, political science, public health, public policy, sociology, and other related fields—to create a network of scholars interested in developing alternative approaches to drug policy.

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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Sometimes it starts with the awkward dinner party question. The table looks lovely, guests are mingling, and people hear you are just back from somewhere. Of course, their interest is piqued. Someone asks, “How was your trip?” I recall the first time I answered that question. I was a graduate student just returned from research on the internal armed conflict that convulsed Peru during the 1980s and 1990s, and the legacies of fratricidal violence for both individuals and communities. I was full of war stories, and several sentences came rushing out before I realized my listeners were all silent. Some looked uncomfortable, others a bit stricken. It felt as though I suddenly came to, and abruptly stopped speaking. Very embarrassed, I quickly added that Peru is a beautiful country with fabulous food. I had been caught off guard.

In the course of interviewing several colleagues about their strategies for taking care of themselves emotionally and psychologically while in the field—and while subsequently writing up their research—the dinner party moment became a leitmotif. One colleague recalled thinking he was doing quite well not long after returning from Bosnia. In Tuzla for two weeks, he had conducted one hundred interviews about the Srebrenica massacre. The question came, and he found himself welling up, bursting into tears, sobbing. He, too, had been caught off guard.

For those of us who study violence and its legacies, being on and off guard mark points on a spatial, temporal, and phenomenological continuum. In the field, being on guard may be crucial to managing danger while we conduct our research, to learning how much to reveal about who we are and what we do, and to navigating our complex emotional reactions to the people and events that engulf us. Being on guard may also be an important coping strategy that allows us to compartmentalize experiences and partition self-as-researcher from self-as-vulnerable-human-being.

Back home, being on guard may be how we manage the lingering effects of violent surroundings and experiences, and how we try to protect friends and family from the full details of what we have seen and heard. But then come those moments when the compartments shift, frequently as the result of a question, a sound, a memory that springs up uninvited.

When I was asked to write this article on self-care for researchers studying and writing on violence, I headed in two directions. The first was to my colleagues, who generously shared their insights with me. I wanted to make certain I included different perspectives on these issues, reflecting gender, ethnicity, age, professional preparation, and regional focus.¹ My colleagues were invaluable, reminding me that one of the best ways we care for ourselves is by reaching out to people who “get it”—people who have also worked on these issues, who allow us to move beyond sharing guarded details about “our trips” to discussing how our research makes us think and feel.

I also headed to the virtual library, googling my way through stacks of self-care texts and workbooks. The self-care literature is vast. It provided some further insights, and a powerful realization: the literature is overwhelmingly aimed at those in the “helping professions.” These include, for example, humanitarian workers, social workers, case managers, and the like. Clearly designed to assist those who work with victims, the literature provides guidance on how best to deal with the “vicarious” or “secondary” trauma this sort of work may inflict on the listener.

My colleagues and I work with victims, to be sure. From Bosnia to Indonesia, from Uganda to Guatemala, Colombia, and Peru, we have collectively spent years listening to victim-survivors and bearing witness to their experiences. To conduct research in these settings, however, is to operate in the gray zone.² We work with complicated victims who may blur tidy moral binaries,

and we also engage with the perpetrators and “violence workers,” who may in turn provoke contradictory reactions.³ Some of these people may appall us; others may become friends we care about very much. A sizeable segment will fall into both categories at different moments in time. Self-care is, I believe, even more complicated in these ethically vexed contexts, and absolutely necessary. Grant applications may not (yet) include a self-care component, but our work plans and research timelines must.

I write this paper fully aware that many readers will consider it a “fluff” piece. Most readers will turn first to articles on safety concerns, then perhaps to secure data management and interviewing techniques. These issues figure among those that grant proposals force us to reckon with, and that we encounter as soon as we begin to conceptualize our research projects. This piece, however, is about research on violence and on its legacies. You will be changed by your research; that is one of the legacies. No, not necessarily turned into one of the walking wounded, but changed in ways that may not be readily or immediately apparent. The awareness of this—and of how the changes manifest across time and space—can make a difference while we conduct our research and when we return from our field sites and sit down to write.

My goal in this piece is to give you some tools that have worked for me and for my colleagues. You may, perhaps, have advisors who have fully prepared you for the rigors of fieldwork; that was not how it worked for me. Frankly, graduate school felt as though I were being inducted into a secret society, left to divine how senior scholars had really conducted their research—and how they had actually written their books. I was mystified when I read their ethnographies; everything seemed to have gone so well for them. That is, of course, part of the “ethnographer’s magic.”⁴

I begin by discussing some of the signs that our work is taking a toll on us, and how “burnout” frequently manifests in a bodily register. Michel Foucault, of course, focused on subjectification and the docile body.⁵ When I recall my own experiences, however, and when I listen to those of my colleagues, rebellious bodies carried the day. Skin lesions, stiff backs, uterine pain, and spectacular gastrointestinal illnesses—*pace* germ theory, “burnout” speaks in a corporeal idiom.

I then turn to some of the self-care strategies we tried, including those that helped and some that did not. Cultivating your own positive techniques

will not only prove beneficial while in the field, but will also serve you well when you sit down to write. The pervasive myth is that people come back from their field sites, sit down at a desk, and begin analyzing their data and moving seamlessly into the writing phase. With the exception of two researchers I have met, that is a fantasy. I have come to think of writing as a *pharmakon*, as both poison and remedy.⁶ Writing plunges many of us back into the field, yet also offers us a way out, and a way to fulfill the enormous responsibility we feel to the questions we have posed and to the people with whom we have worked. Many of us were sent home with the exhortation to “tell people out there what you’ve seen so they will do something about it.”⁷ Writing is one way we honor that charge.

REBEL BODIES AND OTHER SIGNS

One of my colleagues has worked extensively in Indonesia, beginning with the lethal Ambon riots in which Christians and Muslims turned on one another. She found herself providing psychological support to victim-survivors as well as to their caregivers. A constant across these two groups was an array of physical aches and pains, including uterine contractions among female caregivers who had spent hours listening to stories about sexual violence.⁸ During our conversation, she recalled that some of the caregivers had taken to swimming in the sea, the buoyant water cleansing them of the toxic memories they, too, embodied.

I begin with the body because that is frequently where “burnout” first speaks. The self-care literature is helpful here, and the symptoms are remarkably consistent:

- Extreme fatigue, which may be (perversely) accompanied by insomnia
- Anxiety, hypervigilance, and irritability
- Depression, which may appear as lethargy
- Lack of appetite or overeating
- Nightmares, or intrusive thoughts while awake
- Headaches, skin rashes, gastrointestinal problems
- Anger, overreacting to minor upsets
- Forgetfulness or “absentmindedness”
- Difficulty concentrating
- Numbness

Being aware of these physical reactions early on can help you distinguish between a couple of bad days and something more serious and persistent. I found it helpful to check in with myself and with others from time to time and gave my loved ones blanket permission to let me know if I needed to be “reeled in”!

Beyond this list of potential symptoms, however, I think our research affects us in other important ways. One is in the realm of altered perceptions. For instance, one of my colleagues has worked for over two decades in Guatemala, at one point accompanying a forensic anthropology team and collecting testimonies from hundreds of genocide survivors.⁹ She spent months traveling from community to community, listening to testimonies from sunrise to midnight. Periodically she simply had to take a break and leave the physical space in which so much killing had occurred. She and her dog would head back to Guatemala City and to the relative calm of home. As with many of us who indulge our canine companions, she had always given her dog beef knuckle bones to chew on as a special treat. Something changed. The sight of the big, bare bones became intolerable for her; she could not stand even to have them around the house. She had seen too many graves, too many bones mixed in with scraps of clothing—all evidence of genocide. Bones of any sort were no longer just bones, nor could they simply be dog treats.¹⁰

I myself have studied sexual violence for many years. When I was first writing about that part of my research, my housemate in Peru assured me she could always tell when I was working on “those chapters.” I was surprised when she explained, “I know because you cry while you’re writing.” I had been unaware of it. With time, I have found a way to live with the stories, but there are certain images I cannot look at and films I cannot watch. Somehow the words and I have achieved coexistence, but adding in the visual component is unbearable. Knowing one’s triggers and limits is important at every step of the way.

The ways in which men and women express the impact of research and writing on violence also have gendered contours. I have found that women, in general, are more likely to acknowledge their emotional responses and are given more “social space” to do so, in part because of gender norms. Indeed, those same gender norms probably influence how we engage with our “informants.” In working with former combatants, I have found that being a woman frequently works to my advantage; in the overwhelmingly

male environment of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs, the men and women see in me someone with whom they can let down their guard, and they are inclined to talk about their emotional issues.

In contrast, both in the DDR program and in research with gang members, many of my male colleagues enter the world of their informants by becoming “one of the guys,” quick to grab a beer, hang out in the street—in short, to talk the talk and walk the walk.¹¹ This approach gives them access to spaces and conversations not open to female researchers, but it also means that performing male bravado becomes a key component of their research methods. Turning that performance on and off is not automatic, and in numerous conversations I have found myself listening to male colleagues engage in one-upmanship on the “horror index.” Just who has seen the goriest scenes, the most battered bodies, dodged the heaviest rain of bullets? This way of talking about research is common, and although compartmentalization is one way many of us deal with the work, no one should dwell too long in that psychological space. Just as I gave my loved ones permission to tell me when to “reel it in,” I encourage my male colleagues to make certain they check that bravado at the (home) door, and check in with those who share that home. As one colleague I interviewed for this piece noted, learning to pay attention to how we do and do not respond to research and writing on violence—learning the impact this work has on us for better or worse—is part of developing our professional selves.¹² It is also part of staying safe and sane.

IN THE FIELD

The allure of fieldwork is undeniable, and I frequently feel most alive when I am conducting research. After many years working in Peru and Colombia, I have friendships that matter a great deal to me. I can also recall my first research trip to Peru in 1987, however, when I was an undergraduate at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The moments of excitement were matched by those of loneliness, disorientation, and immersion in a language I had yet to fully master. Some days I told my new friends I was on strike and taking a day off from Spanish. I joked that my brain was not up to conjugating even one more irregular verb. At times language (and cultural) immersion leave one utterly exhausted.

Additionally, it is easy to get lost in the “imponderabilia of everyday life,” as Bronislaw Malinowski famously wrote.¹³ Learning to center oneself, to

ground oneself, is important—even more so when working on emotionally taxing topics. So let's begin with what my colleagues and I collectively determined does not work.

One extremely common coping mechanism, and a bad one, is self-medicating. Drinking, smoking, drugs—telling you they are not a good idea is not a moral judgment but rather a caution that this way of dealing with stressors can be toxic. In addition to the health impact, which I certainly do not need to rehearse for you here, being impaired in violent contexts is literally dangerous. We do not make our best decisions when we are drunk or high, and we may place ourselves and our informants at risk. Much of the social navigating we do when working with and around violence depends on listening to an inner voice, on the ability to tune in to something or someone amiss, to feel when the hairs on the napes of our necks bristle. We work in contexts in which secrets and the unspoken figure into our research almost as much as interviews and participant observation, and being “out of it” impairs our navigating skills. In sum, you cannot talk your way out of an explosive situation when you are incomprehensibly slurring your words.

One colleague who has worked in post-tsunami Aceh tried another coping strategy: withdrawing and merely going through the motions of conducting his research. At one point he found himself listening to stories of extortion, humiliation, and torture, all while thinking, “Yeah, I've heard all of this before.” His numbness was accompanied by hours of DVDs, watching entire television series from start to finish in a matter of a few weeks. While initially providing a distraction from the distress around him, the DVDs became something of an obsession, leading to further withdrawal and insomnia.¹⁴

And yet, he was one of two colleagues who questioned the concept of “secondary trauma.”¹⁵ He had received training prior to his research, and the trainer had spent quite a bit of time on this issue. In our interview, he wondered if perhaps the training itself brought on some of his symptoms. Could this be a variation on the medical students who come down with the very ailments they pore over in their textbooks and training? The question is a good one and warrants further consideration.

Elsewhere I have discussed how the discourse of trauma has become globalized and increasingly normative as a result of humanitarian and post-conflict interventions, making it difficult to “think otherwise” about violent events and their consequences.¹⁶ A focus on trauma may obscure the fact

that many people show remarkable resilience in the wake of horrific events. Similarly, some people who do this sort of research may not experience any of these negative effects, or may find them fleeting. They may have personal attributes that result in a high tolerance for witnessing violence and listening to stories about it, or over time they may have developed coping skills that are remarkably effective. I suspect their tolerance is due to a combination of the two, which suggests that taking care of oneself emotionally and psychologically is something each of us can learn.

That learning may include giving some thought to identifying a “safe space” during your research. It may be in your field site—I had a favorite hillside I walked to, where I could stare at the sky and the only sound was the wind—or it may be an apartment you keep near your field site yet at a safe remove. It could be a friend’s house on the other side of the city where someone has a warm meal waiting for you, or some flowers arranged on the desk in your room. It is the idea of maintaining a safe space, and of considering who (if anyone) is in that space with you. In addition to a favorite hillside, I kept an apartment in the capital of Ayacucho, Peru, several hours away from the communities in which I lived and worked. Being at a physical remove helped me make a transition from being an active keeper of the tales to taking some time out for hot showers, roasted chicken, and curling up in my own bed. One added benefit? At times this apartment served, when I consciously allowed it, as a place where informants could search me out and safely speak beyond the eyes and ears of people they feared. The apartment extended safety to me and to the people with whom I conducted my research.

I emphasize “when I consciously allowed it,” because boundaries are another part of our coping repertoire. Learning how to establish boundaries means your safe space extends into the interpersonal realm, functioning as a protective “force field” around you regardless of where you are. Setting boundaries early on (whether during fieldwork, while writing, or as an assistant professor with a line of enthused students waiting outside your door) is much easier than doing it later, when you are stressed out, suffering from “empathy fatigue,” resenting the people around you, and finally losing your temper. We do not have to wait until we are angry to set boundaries; doing so from the start staves off burnout and makes them easier to enforce because they become second nature.

Boundaries also help us accept that we may be unable to change the forms of injustice and abuses of power we encounter during our research. Several

of my colleagues noted the sense of powerlessness they had felt over the years when confronted by staggering physical and structural violence. That powerlessness may be coupled with guilt at our relative privilege.¹⁷ The frustration accompanies us to our computer keyboards, where we realize that whatever we write falls short of doing justice to what we have seen and been told. My best advice—and theirs—is to promise only that which you can do. Identify actions that might help, and do them. Our diligent efforts work too slowly, but there is a cumulative effect when we do something. Each promise we fulfill makes a difference—insufficient, yet certainly preferable to making grandiose but empty promises, or to resignation.

Finally, there is laughter. Weaving a common thread throughout the interviews with colleagues were the moments spent laughing, dancing, and singing. Even in the midst of violence, people create humor. As one colleague wrote, “There are a lot of absurdities of life in warzones that present good material for humor. There are also plenty of moments in which to appreciate what is good about life. I learned to recognize and cherish them.”¹⁸ At times, the social scientist may be a few steps behind the people with whom he or she conducts research. People who have lived through periods of violence may have worked through its most acute impacts and found a way to compartmentalize the legacies into manageable moments rather than being engulfed by them. For those living in the midst of ongoing violence, some form of daily life is usually maintained even under extreme conditions. In my experience, the majority of people do not sit in tragic heaps waiting for the next blow life will send their way. Those of us researching and writing on violence can learn much from the “expert survivors” around us.

WRITING (OUT) VIOLENCE

When I teach “Violence in the Andes: Coca, Conflict and Control,” one of my class’s favorite books is Michael Taussig’s *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza in Colombia*.¹⁹ The opening sentence grabs them: “In May 2001, I spent two weeks in a Colombian town taken over by paramilitaries imposing law and order through selective assassinations—what Colombians call a *limpieza*.”²⁰ The book is in part the chronicle of a *limpieza* foretold. The word refers to healing a person from spirit attack or sorcery—a purging of sorts. It has also come to mean “social cleansing,” the eradication of people classified as undesirable. In February 2001, the paramilitaries announce their imminent arrival: “The town needs to get 300 coffins ready. Heads up!

The priest better be ready to work overtime.”²¹ The paramilitaries do arrive, with lists and laptops, setting themselves up to stay in the Hotel Cúvido in the town plaza. They begin posting lists that separate the living from the dead; yet, the lists are always open-ended and incomplete, subject to revision and expansion. The ostensible targets are the *delincuentes*, an elastic category that contracts and expands to include the youth gangs, the drug addicts, the unemployed, the men with long hair or earrings, the transvestites—or people who, via contagion theory, can somehow be associated with any of the above. Cleansing and contagion proceed, mirroring the ambiguity of the term *limpieza*. Caught up in the midst of one *limpieza*, Taussig turns to his diary in hopes of purging himself of the malignity of the events that surround him. In the pages that follow, he offers a sustained reflection on what it means to research and write on violence.

Throughout our research, we keep field notes. The more detailed our notes, the better when we sit down to write our dissertations and books. The vivid color of the evening sky, a particular phrase that stubbornly reappears, a dusty file in the archive that traces the extensive kinship web of local drug traffickers—field notes are the cornerstone of what we do. There is also the diary, however, in which we write about what we feel and experience along the way. The diary serves therapeutic functions, to be sure. As with Taussig, it allows us to externalize onto paper (or a secure laptop) the complex reactions we have to people and events surrounding us. At times, when the intensity of what is happening defies our social scientific categories and constructs, the diary becomes the place in which we register the immediacy of life.

This partitioning—social science and data into field notes, affect and experience into a diary—can help us manage difficult fieldwork situations. Compartmentalization serves a purpose at times and can help us “write out” the violence. I am convinced, however, that one reason most academic writing is leaden and tedious is because academics maintain the compartments when they write their books. I respect disciplinary norms and how they shape the presentation of data, but at the end of the day what we write should draw our readers in and keep them there. To help you do so, I offer some thoughts on writing, and on self-care while staring at the computer screen.

Writing can be a way to channel what we have seen and heard into something concrete, and the process of intellectually framing our research findings can

serve as a form of mastering what we have lived. In writing we give structure to what may have been, at times, inchoate and disturbing experiences. The act of writing can help us regain a sense of efficaciousness and productivity, both important antidotes to what may have been a sense of powerlessness to change what we saw.

As a *pharmakon*, however, writing also leads to restimulation. The weight of the voices, the lacerating pain of people's life histories, the moral charge to do something with our research—it may feel easier to scrub the bathroom, grade student papers, or simply “space out” in front of the computer and wonder how the last few hours completely evaporated. “Lost time” is one form of dissociating from our research findings, and from the challenges of writing a text commensurate with our material.

Construct a ritual for yourself. Just as it was necessary to ground yourself while conducting research in a violent context, you also need to center yourself as you write about the violence. The ritual can begin with a particular cup of tea, with deep breathing or meditation, or a particular chair at just the right angle: construct a simple and mobile ritual that allows you to enter the mental and physical space of writing, stay there, and then exit when you are finished for the day.

My own writing ritual is based upon tips gleaned from three books I highly recommend: *How to Write A Lot*, *The Now Habit*, and, more recently, *Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction*.²² These books offer practical mechanics and an understanding of the psychological challenges and rewards of writing. Among the elements of my ritual are the following:

- A tape that centers me in the present and focuses my energy. The script is one I wrote, using suggestions from these books, and is recorded in my own voice. I find most self-help or self-care tapes are treacle (think Stuart Smalley on Saturday Night Live, looking in the mirror and telling himself, “Gosh darn it, I’m good enough, smart enough, and people like me”).
- We frequently think in terms of managing time, but it is really about managing ourselves. Keep a written log for a week of how you actually spend your “writing time.” Are you writing, or answering e-mails and updating Facebook? The “lost time” issue can be radically diminished by having some sense of

accountability to a written time log or schedule. We do not “find time” to write; time is not waiting for us around some corner or hidden under a rock. We make time to write and then need to guard it.

- If you are blocked, write out one powerful memory or conversation. It is powerful because it condenses vital aspects of your research. Write it out first, and worry about where it will go later.
- Writing can provoke many emotions, among them anxiety and a desire to be virtually anywhere other than in your chair facing the computer screen. Start with thirty-minute intervals. Turn everything else off. You can set a timer if that helps, and make yourself move your fingers over the keyboard for thirty minutes. You will write. Sometimes you will hear that alarm buzzing like a savior; other times you will just keep writing, because writing is generative of more writing. We do not simply transmit from brain to keyboard what we already know; writing generates new material, and ideas you did not previously have. Try it for one week and see what happens.

My colleagues have their own rituals and writing strategies, as each of you have or will have. One keeps certain files at her office, wanting her home space and young daughter to be insulated from the violence registered in those materials.²³ This allows her to demarcate space and transition between her research on genocide and her role as mother. Importantly, it frees up the many other aspects of who she is and of her life, which is certainly not all tragedy.

This is also the time to reach out to your colleagues who “get it.” Form a writing group—even if distance means it must be via Skype—and turn the solitary act of writing into a collective and supportive endeavor. I think again of the ethnographer’s magic: most of the books we read have only one author’s name on the front cover, obscuring the dialogic aspects of all of our work. With a wave of the writing wand, the conversations we have are compartmentalized into the acknowledgments section and the footnotes. All research is collaborative, however, forged in the powerful conversations we have with “informants,” as well as with other researchers. Dispense with the magic and embrace the conversations you can have with your colleagues

who also work on these issues. Fellow researchers are people with whom you can skip the dinner party awkwardness and go straight to the core of what this research and writing entails.

Finally, one specialist on self-care, Dr. Beth Hudnall Stamm, suggests carrying a pocket card with ten prompts that remind you to take care of yourself and how to do so with care, energy, and compassion:²⁴

1. Get enough sleep.
2. Get enough to eat.
3. Vary the work you do.
4. Get some light exercise.
5. Do something pleasurable.
6. Focus on what you did well.
7. Learn from your mistakes.
8. Share a private joke.
9. Meditate, relax, or pray.
10. Support a colleague.

You may want to tailor these ten items to your own particular challenges, but I encourage you to write them down somewhere. Keep the list with you, post it on the wall next to your computer screen, and look at it when your mind is racing. It can center you and place you in the present moment.

CONCLUSION

When I finished writing *Intimate Enemies: Violence and Reconciliation in Peru*, I struggled with how best to end a book about lethal, fratricidal violence. I realized that readers might feel emotionally taxed by the time they reached the afterword; they might feel a certain despair when contemplating the tremendous cruelty human beings can inflict on one another. Although that is part of the story contained in the book, it is only one part. As I discovered, any effort to understand post-conflict reconstruction must be attuned both to devastation and to people's tenacity for life.

I decided to end by sharing one conversation from among many with Marcos Rafaelo in the village of Carhuahurán. Late one afternoon, he described the worst years of the *sasachakuy tiempo*, the "difficult time," as Quechua speakers refer to the war. Marcos recalled how the men had patrolled in the frigid cold of the mountaintops or stood guard all night in drafty stone

watchtowers. People took to sleeping fully clothed so they could run if shots rang out warning of an enemy attack. Entire families sought refuge in the damp, dank caves at night, the rabid bats further disturbing their sleep. He recalled the pain of seeing loved ones murdered, slaughtered much like the livestock that were decimated during the war. Vast tracts of land lay fallow, while empty bellies rumbled and mothers gave their children water flavored with salt in an effort to “trick their stomachs” and still their tears. He recounted it all in a stoic monotone.

Eventually the conversation turned to his family, and I asked him where he had met his wife, Demetria. “In the caves,” he replied without skipping a beat.

I thought I had misunderstood him. “What? The caves?”

Marcos sat back and looked at me slyly. “It was really cold in those caves. We had to do something to keep warm at night.”

In my research, I explored what people say they suffer from, and how they attempt to set things right. This required me to hold present both suffering and resilience, and to help my readers imagine what it is that permits people to get up in the morning and believe—despite all evidence to the contrary—that there might be a better day ahead of them and a future for their children. This still remains the most enduring memory of my fieldwork. When I close my eyes, I recall moments doubled over laughing, dancing until we could no longer stand up, children running into my room and piling on my bed, singing until the candles burned down and there were only stars streaming through the cracks in the corrugated aluminum roof. I remember more than endurance. There were also moments of joy that stretched into hours that in turn became days. Even in the midst of violence, life is not only tragic.

Taken as a whole, I envision the suggestions in this paper as strategies for “resilience planning.” Incorporating some of these strategies into our research and writing plans allows us to practice self-care in its preventive mode rather than waiting until we reach “burnout.” I hope you find these ideas helpful, and that they allow you to be more productive and happier while researching and writing on violence.

NOTES

1. I thank my colleagues Erin Baines, Nelden Djakababa, Jesse Grayman, Victoria Sanford, and Harvey Weinstein for sharing their strategies and experiences with me. All generously allowed me to interview them for this piece, and I am very appreciative. The usual caveats about analysis and authorship apply, and I accept full responsibility for any shortcomings.

2. See Primo Levi for a discussion of the gray zone. *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

3. I borrow the term “violence workers” from Martha Huggins, Mika Haritos-Fatouros, and Philip G. Zimbardo, eds., *Violence Workers: Police Torturers and Murderers Reconstruct Brazilian Atrocities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002). See also Antonius C. G. M. Robben’s “Seduction and Persuasion: The Politics of Truth and Emotion among Victims and Perpetrators of Violence,” in *Fieldwork under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*, ed. Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

4. See George Stocking, *The Ethnographer’s Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992). By the ethnographer’s magic, Stocking is referring in part to the belief that fieldwork is a self-evident endeavor, and to the idea that “anyone can do it [which] seems to be so firmly rooted within the field that the actualities of fieldwork are often taken for granted.” Stocking notes that “although ethnographic fieldwork is virtually a *sine qua non* for full status as an anthropologist, the same cannot be said of formal fieldwork training” (13). He adds, “Certainly there is a pervasive belief that there is something ultimately ineffable about fieldwork; an epistemological ideology of cultural immersion justifies a methodological practice that at some point becomes a matter of sink or swim” (14).

5. “Docile bodies” comes from Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), in which he writes that during the classical age, the body became a target of power, with power understood as productive rather than merely repressive. As he traces shifts in disciplinary techniques, he argues that in modernity individuals are under constant surveillance and subject to constant regulation in ways that are often subtle and thereby seemingly invisible, leading to the normalization and acceptance of such systems. Foucault focuses on the body specifically as the sight of regulation, or more specifically “as object and target of power” historically. He employs the notion of “docility”—the point at which “the analyzable body and the manipulable body” are joined—to illustrate how individuals within their bodies are subjected to institutional regulation. He continues by stating that “a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (136). Bodies are spatially enclosed, partitioned, and ranked so as to maintain order and discipline.

6. The ancient Greek word *pharmakon* is paradoxical and can be translated as “drug,” which means both “remedy” and “poison.” In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, the Egyptian god of writing offers King Thamus writing as a “remedy” (“*pharmakon*”) that can serve as a mnemonic device. Thamus refuses the gift on the grounds it will only create forgetfulness; for him, it is not a remedy for memory itself, but merely a way of reminding. Writing is thus a “poison”

("pharmakon"), as it both preserves and destroys memory. In his reading of the *Phaedrus*, Derrida focuses on the "pharmakon" as that which produces a flickering and disorienting play in conceptual or philosophical oppositions: remedy/poison, good/bad, true/false, positive/negative, interior/exterior. Derrida thus insists on the fundamental ambivalence of writing and of the *pharmakon*. See Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

7. The charge to carry a message to some imagined "international community"—imagined as moral, caring, and disposed to action if only provided with the necessary knowledge—can be a painful fiction. For example, see Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

8. Nelden Djakababa, personal communication, April 4, 2013.

9. For more on her important research, see Victoria Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: MacMillan, 2004).

10. Victoria Sanford, personal communication, March 22, 2013.

11. There are many examples, but a particularly insightful book is Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

12. Harvey Weinstein, personal communication, March 12, 2013.

13. Bronislaw Malinowski is widely considered the founder of participant observation, one cornerstone of the ethnographic method. See Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press [1925] 1984).

14. Jesse Grayman, personal communication, March 11, 2013.

15. Harvey Weinstein, who is a psychiatrist, questions the concept of secondary trauma—that is, the stress that comes from working with traumatized people—because it may inappropriately take the focus off the survivors, diverting attention from the people who actually experienced the violence. Personal communication, March 12, 2013.

16. See Kimberly Theidon, *Intimate Enemies: Violence and Reconciliation in Peru* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

17. Harvey Weinstein, personal communication, March 12, 2013.

18. Erin Baines, personal communication, March 25, 2013.

19. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

20. *Ibid.*, xi.

21. *Ibid.*, 22.

22. Paul J. Silva, *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2007); Neil Fiore, *The Now Habit: A Strategic Program for Overcoming Procrastination and Enjoying Guilt-Free Play* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007); and Tracy Kidder, *Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction* (New York: Random House, 2013).
23. Victoria Sanford, personal communication, March 22, 2013.
24. See <http://telida.isu.edu> or the Action without Borders psychosocial.org website for further information.

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*Kimberly Theidon is a medical anthropologist focusing on Latin America. Her research interests include gender-based and sexual violence, transitional justice, reconciliation, and the politics of postwar reparations. She is the author of *Entre prójimos: El conflicto armado interno y la política de la reconciliación en el Perú* (Instituto de Estudios Peruanos; second edition, 2009) and *Intimate Enemies: Violence and Reconciliation in Peru* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). She is currently working on two book manuscripts. The first is "Pasts Imperfect: Working with Former Combatants in Colombia," drawing upon her research with former combatants from the paramilitaries, the FARC, and the ELN. The second is "Speaking of Silences: Gender, Violence and Redress in Peru," an ethnographically grounded study of reparations, gender, and justice.*