TIME TO KILL THE WITCH? REFLECTIONS ON POWER RELATIONSHIPS WHEN LEAVING THE FIELD

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ABSTRACT

Purpose — To demonstrate why leaving the ethnographic field provides an excellent opportunity for the researcher to engage in reflexivity on all aspects of the research and especially on issues of power, age and gender.

Methodology/approach — An autobiographical reflection on a 40 year career as an ethnographer.

Findings — The autobiographical literature and the methods literature on ethnography has neglected leaving the field, and the opportunities that process provides for reflectivity. The author reflects on issues of power, age and gender as they have been implicated in the various fieldsites studied in her career. The particular field site featured centrally is two martial arts, savate and capoeira.
Originality/value — To improve the quality of reflexive writing on leaving the field.

Keywords: Reflexivity; field relationships; power; age; gender

INTRODUCTION

The ethnographic literature is replete with accounts of access, either giving prescriptive advice or describing the processes reflexively. Leaving the field has received much less attention. This chapter focuses reflexively on the multiple ways in which issues of power, gender and age become problematic when it is time to draw fieldwork to a close. The specific project which is at the heart of the argument — on the teaching and learning of a martial art (capoeira) — began in 2003, so the chapter is also a contribution to the literature on long-term fieldwork. However, my career as an ethnographer of education has included other studies of different lengths, and the issues of power, gender and age, which arose when leaving those fields, are also covered. The chapter begins with a brief explanation of the title and moves on to deal with some background issues before the remaining sections turn to the academic issues around leaving my current field. The background issues are the academic neglect of exits, my previous exits, and capoeira, the Brazilian dance and martial art, my research topic. The central topic is about the two sides (the Janus face) of my own dilemmas, and the lessons learnt from them.

The title refers to my fieldwork pseudonym: in Portuguese ‘Bruxa’ and in English ‘Witch’. Throughout the chapter pseudonyms are used for all the places, and the people, discussed. That is normal, but is somewhat more complicated because in my fieldsite, capoeira classes in the United Kingdom, everyone has a nickname. Very early in the research I created a set of pseudonymous nicknames for my informants as well as allocating ‘normal’ pseudonyms to them. So a Danish man called Lars, with the capoeira nickname Viking, had to have a northern European pseudonym (e.g. Harald) and a pseudonymous nickname (e.g. ‘Noruega’: the Portuguese for Norway). When I was given a real nickname, I had to find myself a pseudonymous Portuguese nickname to be used in publications. In Portugal witches are thought to be plump, because they have grown fat on their ill-gotten gains, so Bruxa seemed appropriate as I am a fat old woman.
A NEGLECTED TOPIC

Issues of access and initial encounters in the field are staples of textbooks (Delamont, 2016; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), the subject of many journal articles (Berg, 2010; Yeo, 2010) and the source of the most colourful and dramatic incidents in many ‘confessional’ texts (Deyhle, 1998). The literature on leaving the field is sparser (Fine, 1983; Maines, Shaffir, & Turowetz, 1980). It is generally the case that qualitative methods books spend many pages on the preliminary and early phases of the research process, and then devote very few, if any, to the later stages such as leaving, and what to do after the fieldwork is over. Brewer (2000) ignores the topic as does Luker (2008). O’Reilly (2009) does not include leaving the field in her book of key concepts, for example. The Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, and Lofland (2001) handbook has no chapter and no index entries for the termination of fieldwork. Nor do Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, and Silverman (2004) have any chapter on exits from the research site, and the only index entry ‘exit strategies’ is to my chapter (Delamont, 2004). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) have no discussion of the topic at all. Delamont (1992, 2003, 2016) is unusual in having a whole chapter on leaving the field, with three other chapters after it. The autobiographical or ‘confessional’ literature is also thin on autobiographical leaving stories, Wulff (2000) being a notable exception. Not one of those gathered by De Marrais (1998), Lareau and Shultz (1996) or McLean and Leibing (2007) is about the termination of fieldwork. Scholars who have asked ethnographers about their practice such as Walford (2007, 2009) and Okely (2012) have also focused on initial stages and working methods rather than exits.

That makes the data gathered in Maines et al. (1980) rare. They corresponded with some distinguished male American ethnographers (Becker, Denzin, Gans, Habenstein, Rains, Roy, Spector, Strauss and Wax) and collected their accounts of leaving their fieldsites. Gans reported that it was easy for him to leave Levittown (the American commuter town where he had been doing fieldwork) because his marriage had broken up, and it was normal for divorced men leave the suburbs. Mrs. Gans’s exit strategy is not mentioned (see Gans, 1968). No one has published a similar exercise with educational ethnographers, with non-Americans, or with women. Altheide’s chapter (1980) frankly admits he left the California TV studio he was studying in part because he had become bored. Maines’s own account of ending his project on postdoctoral fellows in a US graduate school stresses that they were a transient population and so his informants had ‘moved on’ even before he was ready to cease the study (Maines et al., 1980).
The best account I know by an ethnographer reflecting academically on when it is necessary to leave a field site is that of Fine (1983). One of his early projects was on fantasy gamers in the era when games such as Dungeons and Dragons were played by young men around a table in a physical space, rather than in cyberspace. His main site was a room over the local fire brigade station and was therefore protected by his pseudonym as The Golden Brigade. Fine went there as a total novice, almost unable to play. The club had a shifting, informal ‘membership’, so as Fine did the research the population changed. He left when he found he had been there longer than many other players so his role had changed from ‘novice and researcher’ to ‘old hand and expert’. People recruited after his research had begun were asking him for advice and his characters in the game were given power which he did not want. In that subculture new players had powerless characters who did not determine the fate of others. Fine says (1983, p. 252) that having power or authority in games was ‘one of the features I hoped to avoid’. He gradually learnt to referee games, an organising role, and found himself increasingly running things at The Golden Brigade. It was, he concluded, time to leave. Academically, Fine decided that the fieldwork was producing ‘diminishing analytic returns’. That is clearly the best reason for leaving a fieldsite, and one that should be written about, thoughtfully, more than it has been. In a reflexive research tradition, such as ethnography, more attention needs to be paid to researchers’ boredom to the ways in which the fieldnotes shift as they acquire increasing power and knowledge about the activities of their informants, and ‘diminishing analytic returns’. In this chapter my focus is partly on gender and age, and partly on boredom, power and analytic returns. The following sections are autobiographical and reflexive, but are also intended as a contribution to the small literature on exits from ethnographic fieldwork.

FIELDS I HAVE LEFT

I have been an ethnographer since 1969 when I began my doctoral fieldwork in two elite fee-paying Scottish girls’ schools: The Laurels and St. Luke’s. The main pieces of research discussed here are the ethnographies of St Luke’s (Delamont, 1984, 1989) done in 1970 in Scotland, the ORACLE project (Delamont & Galton, 1986) done between 1977 and 1985 in England, the ‘mainstreaming’ study done in 1986 in Wales (see Delamont, 1992, 2003), the capoeira study (Delamont, 2009) done in Wales.

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and England since 2003, and briefly and for contrast the savate investigation (Delamont, 2016) done in England since 2005. Savate is another martial art also known as French kickboxing. The other research I have done has been documentary, or interview based, and is not discussed here.

*Early Fieldwork: Youth and Powerlessness*

My first reflections are about age and power. I will reflect on gender later in the chapter, in the section on the capoeira and savate fieldwork. Clearly I have got older since 1969. When I was in St Luke’s I was 22, and the cohort of young women I studied were 14. The school had no young teachers or student teachers at the time so I was the youngest person in the staff room by some years. The ORACLE fieldwork, done in 1977 and 1978, also found me younger than most of the staff in the four schools. In Ashburton we focused on 9 year olds in their first year in two contrasting 9–13 middle schools, and in Coalthorpe on 12 year olds in their first year in 12–18 Upper Schools. I was much older than the pupils we were observing. Those pupils called me ‘Miss’ and expected me to intervene in fights and know if it was swimming or hockey that day. The work on how Welsh comprehensive schools were integrating children of 12–15 with moderate learning difficulties was done in several schools in 1985, and by then I seemed to be in the middle of the age range of the staff members. Several of these projects were the ethnographic equivalents of ‘fast food’, or ‘grab and go’ or ‘cash and carry’ (rather than drawing on ‘proper’ long-term immersion in a location or subculture), which I have become more and more uncomfortable with as I have got older (see Delamont, 2014).

Until I began to compose this chapter I had never thought about leaving those fieldsites. In the ORACLE and Welsh studies the fieldwork had been organised by the project directors, who held the funding and had negotiated the access. These were mixed schools, and in that way too were contrastive with my initial, and formative, ethnographic experiences. In both projects the fieldwork period was short (the first four weeks of the Autumn term in ORACLE, four weeks in the Welsh schools). I had barely got to grips with the staff, pupils, timetables and buildings when the fieldwork was over. These two projects involved alternate days in different schools, so I was never more than a ‘visitor’. I went back to the ORACLE schools five years later to trace the records of the children we had observed, and found that no one remembered me.
The ORACLE project was unlike any other ethnography I have done because there were six people observing across three pairs of schools in three cities, and I got everyone’s fieldnotes to write up into the eventual monograph (Delamont & Galton, 1986). That took seven years after I had left the four schools so in important ways I was immersed in all six schools long after I had ceased to live in Ashburton or Coalthorpe. I wrote up material from two schools where I had not done any observation at all myself; I was the author with the power because I wrote the transfer ethnography up (Delamont, 1983; Delamont & Galton, 1986), and then the existence of a follow up study in the same schools 20 years later (Hargreaves et al., 2000) all make ORACLE very unlike all the other school research I have ever done.

The St Luke’s fieldwork had been negotiated by me, and was scheduled to last for half a term of full-time observations, with some later paper and pencil questionnaires done the following term. I also interviewed the young women off school premises with their parents’ permission. So, in all these school-based projects, the access agreement included a leaving date, and no decision to leave had to be made. In retrospect all those periods of fieldwork were characterised by my clear feeling that I was powerless, was privileged to be there for any time at all and was essentially a passive parasite at best and a cause or source of trouble at worst, in the schools. At the time I did not think about, or write in my reflexive out of the field diary about exit at all. My leaving-related strategy was only to make sure I had seen everything I needed to at least once (i.e. had I seen top band and bottom band maths? Had I been to dance, drama and metalwork? Had I seen the library and the science teachers’ tea club in the prep room?).

Overall, it might sound pretentious, but it is accurate to say, that because of writing about, and therefore thinking about, the ORACLE schools and St Luke’s for many years after the physical fieldwork in some ways I never did ‘leave’ those fieldsites in my head, though I have not been physically present in them for many years. In the central part of the chapter the focus is on how an ethnographer (me) can be reflexive about exits, and explores two sites where my current research is drawing to a close.

The Current Fieldwork Sites – Capoeira and Savate

All likely readers of the book will have some ideas about schools, but the research I am contemplating leaving is on two martial arts that are not familiar. I have therefore explained a little about both before discussing
leaving the fields. The capoeira study has been done with Neil Stephens (Stephens & Delamont, 2014), a co-author on several papers, who learnt capoeira for six years until his knees became so injury prone he was no longer able to enjoy the classes. He then stopped training, but continued to be engaged with the project intellectually and with many of the students and the teacher socially. These friendships have been facilitated by his investment in the equipment to provide Brazilian music for events. The savate research has been done alone.

Capoeira has its origins in Africa, and when the slaves were transported to the Americas was one of the cultural phenomena such as religion, music, dance styles and specific forms of embodiment which survived the transatlantic voyage and plantation life to become Brazilian, Caribbean and American cultural features. Slaves in the United States, the Caribbean countries and in Brazil probably included those with some tradition of a competitive martial art, but capoeira as it is practised today only survived and eventually developed in Brazil (Assuncao, 2005). It is, for all practical purposes a Brazilian cultural form.

Modern capoeira has two varieties called regional and angola, and since the 1970s both have spread out from Brazil in a diaspora. My research with Stephens has been on capoeira regional as it is taught in the United Kingdom. There are several excellent anthropological monographs on how capoeira is taught in Brazil (Downey, 2005; Lewis, 1992). Originally an all male, African-Brazilian violent street ‘sport’ in Brazil, today capoeira is done by both sexes in formal classes, and outside Brazil is taught as a non-contact activity. It is frequently called ‘the dance-fight-game’ (Capoeira, 2002) because it incorporates all those elements. Two people move, in time to the music, and in a dialogic way launch attacks (mostly kicks) and escape the attacks made on them by dodging, usually close to the floor, and by doing acrobatic moves such as handstands and cartwheels. There are takedowns (such as sweeping away the legs of the opponent) and evading those is taught and applauded. Clever and elegant escapes are valued as much as attacks. Blocking kicks is not central to the art although it is sometimes necessary. Games are played by the people inside a ring (roda) consisting of everyone else present, including 5—12 musicians. The people in the roda sing the choruses of songs, whose verses are sung by one of the musicians, and clap the rhythm. The people in the roda are central to the action, because they create and maintain the energy, or spirit of the games, called axé in Portuguese. Capoeira without axé is dull, meaningless and dispiriting. With axé it is joyful and energising.
Classes in the United Kingdom usually last 90–120 minutes, are mixed, and cost about £6.00 outside London and £8.00 or more in London. Most of the teachers are Brazilian and the few who are not have generally lived in Brazil for a while. The majority are men, from a range of Brazilian ethnicities, and whilst some are highly educated graduates, others are largely without formal qualifications. It is entirely normal for a teacher (mestre or master) with a PhD to revere and expect his students to show deference to another, probably older, master who had only a primary education in Brazil. A typical class will consist of warm up and stretching (longer in the winter in cold halls), demonstration and drill of moves (such as a kick or an escape) and short sequences (such as an escape and a counter attack), and demonstration of paired sequences followed by paired practice of them. Pairs are normally mixed, are changed regularly, and many teachers urge experienced students to ‘train with the beginners’. A few teachers explicitly instruct students in the history and philosophy of capoeira, often by telling stories about Brazil and the great teachers of the past. Others expect students to absorb those features during social conversations and by mixing with more experienced students. Axé and the trickery or deceit that is applauded among experts (called malicia) are usually acquired by what Lave and Wenger (1991) called legitimate peripheral participation (see Stephens & Delamont, 2009).

There are only two classes a week in Tolnbridge, my main fieldsite, but in bigger cities the groups will have lessons five or six days a week, and keen people will train three or four times if they can afford to. Many teachers end every lesson with a roda, but some only have a roda once a week. Regionale capoeira groups have a festival every six months, at which novices are ‘baptised’ into the group (so the festivals are usually called batizados, the Portuguese for baptism), given a capoeira nickname, guest teachers give lessons, and there are parties.

The fieldwork involves attending class in Tolnbridge two nights a week, and often another in London or ‘Cloisterham’ as well. The observation has been supplemented with interviews, done by me in English, or by a Brazilian student in Portuguese because some teachers have very rudimentary English, and are much more comfortable and reflective in Portuguese. Neil Stephens trained seriously from 2003 to 2006, and acquired the skills of a dedicated student, close to his teacher Achilles. The two-handed fieldwork is explored in Stephens and Delamont (2006). With an embodied activity there is a serious argument for having one social scientist learning the skills (explicit and tacit) and a second observing the enculturation. The academic publications are co-authored, and
the more autobiographical pieces such as this are not. Because of the joint publications Stephens needed a pseudonymous nickname as well, and I picked *Trovao* (Thunder) for him, because he sings with a clear loud voice.

In 2005, because I felt I was becoming too familiar with capoeira: a major problem with many educational ethnographies (*Delamont, 2014, 2016*): I began a parallel study of a second martial art, savate. In 2016 I am facing the need to leave that fieldsite too. That research is used in *Delamont (2016)* to illustrate data collection and analysis.

**FACING THE END OF AN ERA: PART ONE**

If I leave the field and stop collecting data for the project, that will mean, effectively that I have decided it is time to face abandoning a long standing pseudonymous identity, or more metaphorically, killing the witch. I first began to consider leaving the field on Halloween in 2012. I was at the desk in my study when I glanced up at the shelves where the A4 notebooks in which the written up versions of the fieldnotes are stored and thought ‘Book One must be from about ten years ago’. When I checked, it had been October 2002 when I walked through Tolnbridge, the university city where I live, to a very scruffy community hall because I had been told by a student that there was a capoeira class there. There was. My fieldwork had begun.

A teacher, I call by the pseudonym Cadmus, an African-Portuguese man based in London, from the *Filhos de Bonfim* (Sons of the Good End) Group had driven to Tolnbridge for the second week running to offer a capoeira class. A local breakdance teacher, Amyas, whose sister learnt capoeira in London, had decided to see if there was a demand for capoeira in Tolnbridge. In 2002 there had been classes in the United Kingdom since the late 1970s, and I had been thinking of trying to get access to one in London for several years without actually doing anything about it. So a class in Tolnbridge was a chance I needed to seize. I had read an anthropological monograph on capoeira in its heartland, Salvador de Bahia in the north east of Brazil (*Lewis, 1992*). Because capoeira is a dance, a fight and a game, done to music with call and response singing, and many of the moves are done upside down in handstands and headstands, it was very hard for me to imagine what it could look like done by real people. If I
could get the teacher to let me watch even one class, I felt that I would be
able to reread Lewis with a more informed eye.

In the event Cadmus, the teacher, was happy for me to watch, and I
could immediately ‘see’ that I had a fieldsite with a dual purpose or func-
tion. The class was an example of teaching and learning and so it could be
‘educational’ research, and it was not boring. I had been so stuck for a
new, inspiring fieldsite that I had even written a paper on how I had lost
my motivation for data collection (Delamont, 1995).

That evening I reread the fieldnotes and diary from 2002. I celebrated,
privately at my desk, the tenth anniversary of my first observation of a UK
capoeira class in Telnbridge.

The initial excitement was somewhat dampened when the classes
collapsed after only six weeks. Cadmus and Amyas decided before
Christmas 2002 that Cadmus could not cover his costs, hiring the hall and
driving from London, even if he brought three friends and got a paid
engagement to entertain in a Telnbridge nightclub after the Saturday after-
noon class. I had found and lost a fieldsite in six weeks. I now know that I
had learnt one valuable lesson about capoeira in the United Kingdom. It is
hard to make a modest living teaching capoeira and if long distance travel
is involved very difficult to break even. Since 2002 I have seen other classes
fold, and heard of many more that collapsed.

Luckily Achilles, a Brazilian capoeira teacher living in Cloisterham, only
50 minutes away, from a different group I call ‘Green Snake’ set up a twice
weekly Telnbridge class in May 2003. I only discovered them in October
2003, and that is when I met Achilles. Green Snake are actively interested
in how capoeira is taught, and the masters (mestres) include several pub-
lished scholars, so Achilles was perfectly happy to be studied. He turned up
to teach regularly, his costs were lower and his classes bigger than Cadmus
had managed and at last I had a stable fieldsite. Since 2003 I have been
able to do fieldwork regularly, and use that as a base from which to travel
elsewhere in the United Kingdom to do comparative observations of other
groups and teachers. I have watched 900 classes of 90–120 minutes
and attended 45 festivals and 37 public performances.\(^2\) I have stood on
stages in rain and sunshine, clapping and singing, processed through towns
and cities carrying water or holding an umbrella over the drum. I have
filled 180 reporters’ notebooks with illegible scribbles. I own dozens of
CDs\(^3\) and about 20 DVDs of capoeira.\(^4\) Teachers sell these especially at
festivals, and it is a polite way to contribute to their incomes. I now turn to
the last part of the chapter, where I have explored the ambivalences I feel
about leaving the field, and focus on gender issues.
FACING THE END OF AN ERA: PART TWO, KILLING THE WITCH IS JANUS-FACED

Janus was the Roman God of thresholds, other liminal spaces and events, and the change from the old year to the new. He is always portrayed with his two faces looking in opposite directions, and is particularly associated with the turn of the year, simultaneously looking back at the old year and forward into the new. In sociology the term Janus-faced is used as a shorthand for ambivalence or contradiction. Murray, Dingwall, and Eekelaar (1983) write about the professions in this way. Here I use it in two ways — first as a way of signalling that I am looking backwards and forwards, and secondly that my reflections are ambivalent.

Realistically the capoeira research (and the contrastive work on savate) are my final ethnographies. At 68 I am not going to start new projects. If I leave capoeira, and kill Bruxa, I will be terminating a big part of my identity, both personally and academically. As I have explained elsewhere (Delamont, 2013) I am a workaholic: no family, no hobbies, no ‘life’ outside work. Bruxa has a lot of fun, dressing up and ‘going to Brazil’. Once in a capoeira class or festival I am in a noisy, infectiously gay and energy-filled space, where I can enjoy seeing people getting better at something they love. Lots of people are friends, and there are always new things to learn. Perhaps more importantly my academic identity and credibility would be damaged. It is not clear to me how I could write or talk about qualitative methods if I were not actually doing some fieldwork myself.

At Christmas 2014 I retired from my full time university post, and now only have a part time appointment focused on research. There is no longer a need or requirement to be doing research to infuse undergraduate or postgraduate teaching. However, as long as I am writing about research methods, refereeing journal articles, examining theses, and attending seminars, I feel I should be experiencing all the phases of research. It seems hypocritical to say to anyone else ‘have you written up that incident?’ if I no longer have anything to write up myself.

Fine’s experience in The Golden Brigade does give me pause. I have not become an expert player of capoeira: I have not learnt to do any of the physical moves, or play any of the instruments, and I do not sing the solos of songs. There is no equivalent of a referee in capoeira so I have no power in the games. The savate teacher I watch has suggested I should (or could) learn to be a judge, but I have not (yet?) taken the training. It would be disingenuous, though, to reject all of Fine’s points about the changing nature of my expertise after 13 years in the field. I can see when novice
students are doing the paired sequence wrong, and if I think they are in danger of getting hurt I even intervene (gently). I might say ‘do keep your guard up in case you get kicked’ or ‘if you are going to fall tuck your chin in’.

Worse I occasionally say something publically — after asking Achilles’s permission — such as; ‘If you are getting a belt at the festival you need clean white trousers: you can buy them from Achilles tonight’ or ‘Next Friday the Manic Street Preachers are giving a concert in the city centre so the traffic will be bad’. In the Spring of 2015 when Achilles was about to make each person present sing a solo, and I thought the majority of the students, mostly novices, were apprehensive and looked miserable at the prospect, I diverted Achilles’s attention. Guessing that a good many people present knew little or nothing of the slave roots of capoeira because they had only been training for two or three months, and Achilles rarely gives lectures about capoeira, I created a diversion. One experienced student had led the class by singing a song about the secrecy of real names, and the trickery (*malicia*) of good capoeira. I told the class briefly that *malicia* goes back to the strategies the slaves used to survive, and the nicknames date from the post-slavery era (1888–1935) when capoeira was a black male street pastime and was illegal. I said ‘if the police caught you, and your friends escaped and ran away, and the police were torturing you to get their names, you could say they were Black Diamond and Big Ears’.

As the conversation continued, Achilles said ‘Listen to Bruxa, she knows all about it’, so I continued my diversionary tactics by saying that one of Achilles’s masters had done his PhD on the legalisation of capoeira, and written a beautiful song about capoeira as a dance of liberation, that all capoeira people, of all races, can share and then be proud of its African roots. I then said ‘Achilles — we don’t sing that song do we? Is it too complicated?’ Achilles replied it was a beautiful song, but very hard for people who ‘don’t have Portuguese’ to sing. But he went on he could sing it to us. He did so and by the time he had finished it was too late for everyone to have to sing solos. I had intervened spontaneously, was delighted that Achilles sang that song which I had never heard him do before but I was wrong. I had moved into the equivalent of Fine refereeing games or playing a character with a lot of power. I came over as far too powerful.

I agreed to write this chapter, and I forced myself to consider leaving altogether, an issue I had up to now avoided. When teachers, or advanced students, ask me when I am going to stop I say two things. Firstly, I say that Achilles, Trovao and I are going to write a book: which is true.
Secondly I say that I still have a lot to learn because I cannot yet do something teachers (and some advanced students) are able to do. When a teacher is at an event where there are students from several different groups, not wearing the uniform of their mestre, he or she can recognise who their mestre is from the style of their play. I hear people say ‘She’s from Abolicao – Mestre X’ or ‘He’s a student of Mestre Z’s’ and I cannot do that. Enquirers say ‘That is a good question’ or ‘Ah yes – you need to learn that’ and change the subject. So until the day when I can go to an event, see a person in their street clothes, deliver three kicks and do some acrobatics and think: ‘I bet they’re from Group N’ I do not plan to kill the witch. The next section draws my thoughts to a close and reflects on issues of gender and power.

GENDER AND POWER

I have published one autobiographical paper on gender in the capoeira project (Delamont, 2005) when the fieldwork was in its early stages. As I face up to it ending the issues are a little different. In the autobiographical piece (Delamont, 2005) I confessed that my capoeira project was focused primarily on men, and that I could see pattern in my life of wanting to be ‘where the boys are’ (to quote the title of a 1960s song performed by Connie Francis). I grew up in a small village that had a naval training school founded by C. B. Fry. Every Sunday they marched past my house, in full sailors uniform behind a brass band to and from church. At the age of about three I evaded my mother and ran after the parade calling out ‘Boys, boys, boys’. Adults told that story for many years implying that I was attracted to them. I was, but not in the way those adults found funny. I wanted then, and went on wanting for many years not be the girlfriend of a sailor, but to be a pupil there. They wore sailors uniforms, they slept in hammocks on a real ship moored in the middle of the river, to which they commuted by rowing boats. They had playing fields, but these included a tall framework of ropes, like the rigging on a sailing ship, which they all climbed. This fantasy was fuelled by a favourite book Susannah of the Mounties (Denison, 1936) about an eight-year-old girl who desperately wants to be accepted as a Canadian Mounted Policeman with the iconic red coat. After her attempts to prove herself go wrong and are seen as naughtiness, she finally manages to capture Joe Labiche, a ‘most wanted’ criminal. The commanding officer recognises her desire and she gets her red coat. I played Captain Hornblower and cowboys and Indians with a
group of boys, and I hated the ballet *Rodeo* where the girl who wants to outride and outshoot the men is ignored, until she puts on a silly, frilly dress and becomes the belle of the ball. I thought that was a tragic ending, not a happy one (and I still do).

In the 2005 paper I confessed that I can see the capoeira and savate research as an academic equivalent of running after the naval band. I stated then that I ought to find a woman teacher to study and focus much more on women students. Ten years later I have done neither, and I have repeated the same gendered pattern in the savate research. Nor am I close in this. Few people have studied women in martial arts, and most women who have studied martial arts have focused on men. Garcia and Spencer (2013) edited a collection of papers in which ethnographers write about their research on martial arts they themselves practice. There are 14 papers by 13 authors of which four are women (including me). There have been several autobiographical pieces by male educational researchers who had studied young women such as Furlong (1976), Meyenn (1980) and Mac an Ghaill (1994), but the most relevant reflections for me are those of Woodward (2008). She is an experienced ethnographer of male boxing and writes reflexively about gender in such settings. She points out that:

> To be able to say that you ‘hang out’ with boxers, as ‘one of the guys’, supports an identification with a powerful, longstanding version of masculinity. (Woodward, 2008, p. 538)

*Woodward* (2008, p. 545) argues that the very fact of being a female researcher allows for the ‘disruption’ of male boxers and trainers’ ‘practical beliefs’. A ‘maternal’ role, possible for Woodward who had children, reduced tensions around sexualities, but was very gendered. I recognise myself in Woodward’s reflection that fieldwork for a woman which involves hanging out among men is reinforcing of traditional ideas of masculinities. Capoeira was for a century as masculine a world as boxing, and is still dominated by male performativity and embodiment.

I should feel ashamed of myself but I do not: I chose the topic to meld my interests in Brazil and in processes of teaching and learning, and keep me ‘sharp’ as an ethnographer so I could teach methods. The capoeira project did all that, produced a lot of journal articles and a book, and if I have been able to use my gender to get access to lots of classes and festivals where people seem comfortable to let me watch, I am unrepentant.
LESSONS LEARNT

Reflecting on exits for this piece there are ‘four’ lessons all interrelated, and all brought to the front of my mind by writing this chapter. First, my ‘out of the field’ diaries are not nearly explicit enough or reflexive enough about all aspects of leaving the field. Second, I have not encouraged my colleagues and students to focus reflexively on their exits. Third, I have only just realised that when doing ethnography in formal organisations I have always felt relatively powerless, and had a fixed endpoint for the study set up as part of the access agreement which I worked to. That is, it was not until I was preparing this chapter that I recognised that important aspect of most of my research career. Had I been more conscientious about my own reflexive dairy, and more self-conscious whilst discussing exits with colleagues and students, I would have (as I should have) realised that long ago. Fourth, as I have got older I have been able to choose research sites that I enjoy more, and in which I have a more open-ended intellectual agenda. Rather than ‘grab and go’ fieldwork I prefer the long haul or ‘slow food’ kind. Thus I can ‘see’ more clearly why I do not want to leave the savate and capoeira research. No leaving date was part of the access negotiations, I feel more powerful, and those fieldsites provide data with which I am much more satisfied.

CONCLUSIONS

Exits have been neglected in the instructional and the reflexive literature. In fact the processes, both practical and theoretical, deserve to be discussed more extensively. Just as access negotiations and first encounters are extremely revealing about the subculture(s) under study, so too the exit processes may be just as academically productive. There is a need for systematic inquiry into the exit strategies of successful ethnographers (and not just white American men), so that novices can learn to manage theirs and maximise the intellectual payoff for them.

NOTES

1. Capoeira teachers usually belong to a group or lineage, with its headquarters in Brazil (Assuncao, 2005). I have invented fictitious groups in the chapter.
The Church of Our Lord of the Good End or Good Death (Nossa Senhor de Bom Fim) in Salvador is important in African-Brazilian culture, the Green Snake ( Cobra Verde) features as a good luck symbol in a song. To the best of my knowledge no real capoeira group present in the United Kingdom is called the ‘Sons of Our Lord of the Good End’, or ‘Green Snake’.

2. Many groups give public performances, in night clubs, schools, prisons, shopping centres, museums and outdoors, to celebrate Black History Month, carnivals, arts festivals, ethnic events and ‘one world’ celebrations. Some are done to earn money for the club, others to publicise capoeira and some for charity. In 2013 Achilles’s group did charity performances at a Hindu cultural festival, at student events celebrating multi-culturalism, in a prison, and in a museum for Black History Month and one commercial event when a Brazilian restaurant opened in Tolnbridge.

3. Most teachers sell CDs of their groups playing and singing capoeira songs at festivals.

4. DVDs of festivals and of historical masters are also sold.

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REFERENCES


