Qualitative Transparency Deliberations

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Field Notes: Slowly Evolving/Reflexive Analysis and DA-RT

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Field Notes: Slowly Evolving/Reflexive Analysis and DA-RT

Posted: **Mon Nov 07, 2016 1:57 pm**
by **Diane Singerman**
Many scholars who write field notes while doing ethnographic or other kinds of reflexive and qualitative research in repressive societies, record their observations, comments, and analyses over many months or years, as well as their challenges during this period. DA-RT calls for archiving these field notes, after anonymizing them, in the quest for greater data access, production transparency, analytic transparency, and the quest for replicability. How would these requirements (or indirect influences) impact comparativists in repressive societies who diligently record detailed, often daily, notes while conducting field work over long periods of time?

Re: Field Notes: Slowly Evolving/Reflexive Analysis and DA-RT

Posted: **Sat Nov 12, 2016 5:08 am**
by **ailitripp**
I work in authoritarian contexts. I cannot imagine making my fieldnotes public. Apart from the obvious danger they might put my interviewees in since I work in authoritarian contexts, how could these notebooks possibly help anyone else? They are written to myself. They include interviews with people I did not want to tape because I felt the person would not talk freely if I taped the interview or because they refused to be taped. They include discussions with my assistant and lunch/dinner conversations friends and acquaintances I did not interview but found their observations interesting nevertheless. If it was not a formal interview but an informal discussion I did not ask them whether they wanted to be taped or interviewed, so the IRB protections do not cover them. They include observations of demonstrations, some illegal in places where journalists are thrown out of the country over covering such demonstrations.

They include reflections on the news. They include jokes, rumors, hearsay, graffiti, which may or may not be true. They cannot be used as hard evidence of anything, but might be used to reflect on a popular sentiment. They include comments people make that are racist or sexist or offensive in some way. All this requires context and interpretation and cannot be presented in a standalone fashion. Sense needs to be made of these notes. Alone they mean little to the reader and can easily be misinterpreted.

Making fieldnotes public assumes that knowledge and understanding is something is acquired in discrete pieces rather than something that evolves over time and builds on previous knowledge. What I once thought

early on was important I no longer think as questions get answered through the interviews and my understanding improves. They reflect my own ignorance of a situation more than anything else, but it changes as my research experience continues. Publishing early musings in a project is useless.

What do people imagine are in such fieldwork notes? I think there is an image that they are coherent, orderly observations about one's daily experiences. There is some of this. But my notes also include a lot of ephemera. They include messy abbreviated lists of what I know, still need to know and still need to ask about. They include outlines for papers and my book and these outlines also evolve. My notebooks include interview questions for specific people; book and author references; spellings of people's names who I should interview, phone numbers of people to contact, to do lists, shopping lists, words that have been translated and spelled out in a foreign language, definitions of words, explanations of the meaning of foreign terms and concepts that cannot easily be translated into English, etc. How would these benefit anyone else but myself?

Re: Field Notes: Slowly Evolving/Reflexive Analysis and DA-RT

Posted: **Sat Nov 12, 2016 5:17 am**
by **Guest**

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