

Academia and Identity

when research meets activism



Experiences, opinions, insights and outlooks.
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Intro



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Academia and Identity - when research meets activism

This booklet is the output of a workshop organized in Leuven, Belgium, in March 2015. Many academics' personal identity, politics and ideals are confronted within their work. This workshop aimed to open the discussion about how to navigate these issues and remain true to our selves while being *good academics*. In this booklet, the participants, the audience and the organizers present their own work and reflections on the workshop.

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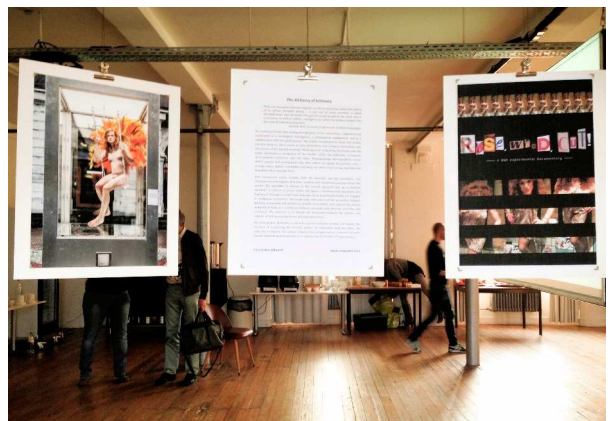


PHOTO BY VICTORIA COFFEY

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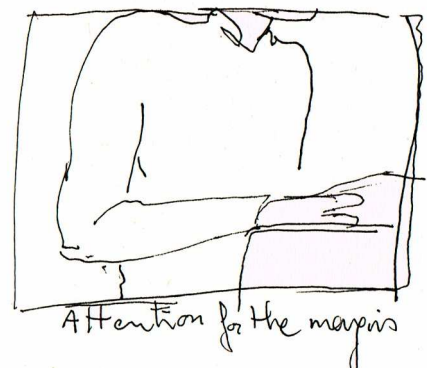
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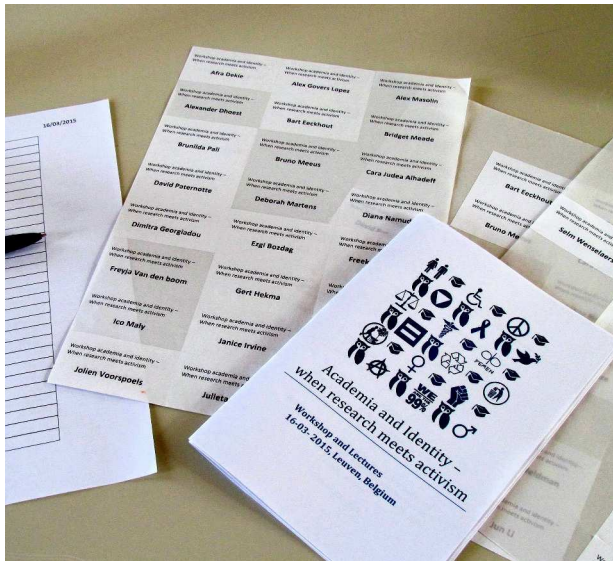


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PHOTO BY A. NONYMOUS

Why 'Academia and Identity'? Some thoughts on this workshop and magazine

The intent of our workshop was to open a space to discuss the intersections of our private selves, academic positions and responsibilities and activist engagement. We are convinced that these entities are inevitably connected to each other, and within some academics' work, these intersections prove to be an obstacle or, on the contrary, a catalyst—either within their research or in their position within academia. We wanted to address the fruitful friction in which the position of the speaker shifts from academic to activist/political individual. We want to engage with these moments, when and why they occur, and how we as individuals and academics deal with them. Since many of us encounter such situations, but within academia it is not easy to find an appropriate space in which to talk about them and receive feedback in a constructive environment. Some of these experiences are very personal and possibly controversial, which makes it vital to offer a safe space,

in which dialogue and constructive criticism are encouraged, and an open mind towards the very different backgrounds and viewpoints of all participants is kept. Therefore, we organized a one day workshop, inviting persons to submit their personal experience in the form of short stories and presentation. Apparently, our call struck a chord: we received 27 contributions from Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK, Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Germany. The number of different disciplines represented was rather impressive: the contributors have backgrounds in sexualities, Deaf Studies, ICT, migration studies, anthropology and many others.

Workshops like these are one way to make academia more activist and personal. With this independent publication we want to reflect on a wonderful workshop and point out that it is vital to exercise reflexivity and think about our position as academics, activists and individuals.

Marion Wasserbauer &
Valerie De Craene

The functioning and failure of academia and activism - A contextual introduction

Valerie De Craene



In a diverse society, the formation of identities and groups is subject to a continuing political struggle within the public sphere. Identity serves as a source of political commitment, as a catalyst for political mobilisation, and/or as a subject of political conflicts. Identity creates shared interests, and as such makes them tangible. It is also a source of solidarity networks and cooperation, while the boundaries of what constitutes an identity continues to create an ongoing struggle of who belongs and who doesn't. The "politics of identity" is therefore personal.

Also for scholars belonging to an (ethnic, cultural, sexual,...) minority, identity is a source of commitment. It inspires their research, it often becomes the subject of their research, but it also drives their political commitment. The intrinsic personal and political characteristics of such a research usually demands for a closer involvement by the researcher, not only to the research topic but also to the research subjects. Because of this involvement, it is not surprising that many scholars are (also) involved in political action.

But there is the rub. Universities are often perceived as separate or different from the rest of society, as if it were free of political struggles, and serve as free havens for fundamental and independent research, in a quest to search for ‘the truth’. This objectivist ontological position brings along a series of norms of what good research is about and how methodologically and ethically sound research must be conducted. In this positivist vision, academics must be objective, neutral and independent. This idea has been strongly criticized by mainly feminist scholars, who have established the so called ‘reflexive turn’ within social sciences (Stanley & Wise, 1990) . Many scholars have become used to reflect on their social location and background, including their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, religion, class, political beliefs and so on, and how these aspects might influence the research process (Finlay, 2002; Lumsden, 2012). The idea is that we know and acknowledge the influence of our positionality on the way we select case studies, on our analyses, and therefore on the research results and the knowledge we produce. However, in his opening key note lecture on our workshop, Ico Maly clearly showed how both within and outside academia this approach is still largely overlooked by a hegemonic idea of truth as science deprived of politics: “the academic regime of truth states that mixing politics with science is regarded as ‘ideological’ and ‘thus’ as the end of science” (Maly, 2015).

Institutional and societal context

Yet, research is not only influenced by the positionality of the researcher, also funding possibilities strongly influence which research gets money, and which research does not. Policies on how to invest in research, are informed by both the institutional context and the societal context. One example in the Belgian context is the topic of cyberbullying, where some stories of tragic incidents have received quite some media coverage, creating a higher societal need for (applied) research, which has led to increased funding opportunities through the Flemish government for this research topic (see e.g. Walrave, 2009; Vandebosch e.a. 2014). The institutional and societal context matter not only for funding possibilities, they also have a direct influence on our research: they shape the way universities are structured, they shape debates and discussions in media, making some topics more relevant than others, etc. In her key note lecture at the ‘Social Class in 21st Century Conference’ (organized by the Amsterdam Research Center for Gender and Sexuality), Gloria Wekker criticized “our fundamentally not engaging with race/ethnicity and how this slams our understandings of gender and sexuality” (Wekker, 2015). She identified a number of factors why race has been absent in the Dutch context (as well as in the wider European context), one of them being that there is no place within academia (left) where race is a central point of entry for academic inquiry. Not race but ethnicity is studied, she argues, an approach which departs from “the other” and therefore often leaving out whiteness, while being at the root of academic labour. Indeed, sexuality and gender have separate research centers and educational programs, while the lack of race in the way universities are structured has also shaped the debate on for example ‘Zwarte Piet’, she states.

Indeed, also the visibility and organizational structure of universities and the politics within those institutions constitute the production of knowledge, creating absent and present topics within academia, and determine which voices are heard and which are silenced, what knowledge we produce and what becomes the center of academic debates, while other topics are marginalized and are at the periphery of academic knowledge. On top of that, the

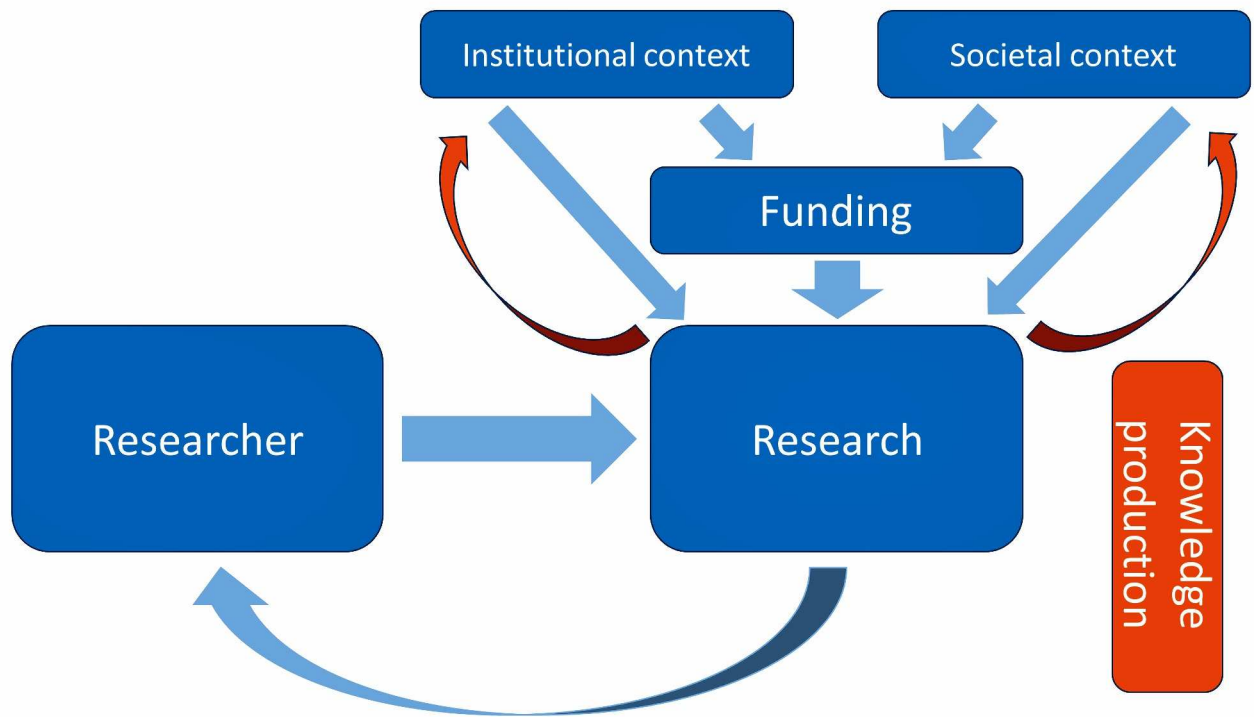


ILLUSTRATION BY VALERIE DE CRAENE

academy is being dramatically transformed by processes of neoliberalisation, in which “new forms of academic subjectivity are being produced via more hierarchical power relations that interlock with already-existing forms of exclusion including patriarchy, classism, ableism, heterosexism, and racism” (Berg e.a., 2015: 1).

Playing the game?

Following this line of thought, it becomes clear that politics do not only affect the researcher on an individual level, nor do they stop at the borders of universities and other academic institutions; politics are an integral part of society and therefore universities. As such, identity politics also influence research policy, applications and promotions. Influenced by evolutions and debates within the larger society, universities and university colleges develop gender action plans, diversity plans and non-discrimination policies. These policy measures are of great personal importance to and have a large influence on the career opportunities of scholars belonging to a minority group. Especially for them, participating in these evolutions and debates is even more important, often leading to an even stronger commitment. Often it proves to be very difficult to find a balance between trying to build an academic career and conforming to existing evaluation criteria while at the same time confronting and tackling hegemonic and institutionalized ideas of what constitutes good research. It’s a delicate exercise where the challenge to play the game while at the same time trying to change the rules of the game, often leads to ethical, methodological and strategic dilemmas.

Being involved in research on identity and a commitment in identity politics also shapes, questions, challenges, and redefines our own identity formation and touches upon the researcher’s body. Consequently, our personal and professional life are intrinsically linked and an intrinsic motivation to shape or change academic and political debates only grows stronger.

Failure

Unfortunately, too often this kind of research where academia and activism meet each other is seen as ‘failed research’, as it does not comply to the hegemonic positivist view of the objective and neutral researcher. This leads to limited spaces where it is possible to openly discuss the difficulties that are inherent in emotional, embodied and empathic research, as speaking of failure might be grist to the mill to those adversaries of such an approach. Indeed, in times of increasing quantifiable research outputs where mainly publications and citations are valued, there is little time and space left for anything else but building a CV filled with these specific academic outputs, leaving out the work spent on education and especially societal commitment, or, for the matter, on ‘failed’ research. In that sense, there is a structural need to talk about the functioning and failure of science and academia. The workshop held on the 18th of March 2015 in Leuven, and the reflections of that workshop gathered in this booklet, want to provide a space to discuss the balance between academic work at the one hand, and the political commitment on the politics of identity on the other, in all its messiness and potential failure. As such, we hope to exchange (1) experiences: which problems and difficulties do academics experience when combining academic work and political commitment? Which impact does it have on their career opportunities? (2) personal and collective strategies: how do academics cope with this tension, which personal balance do they look for, which alliances are developed, and which strategies and tactics are used to achieve this balance? (3) analyses of diverse societal contexts: public culture, policy and law towards minorities differ strongly from one country to another. As such, this might influence the personal and collective strategies that academics could use.

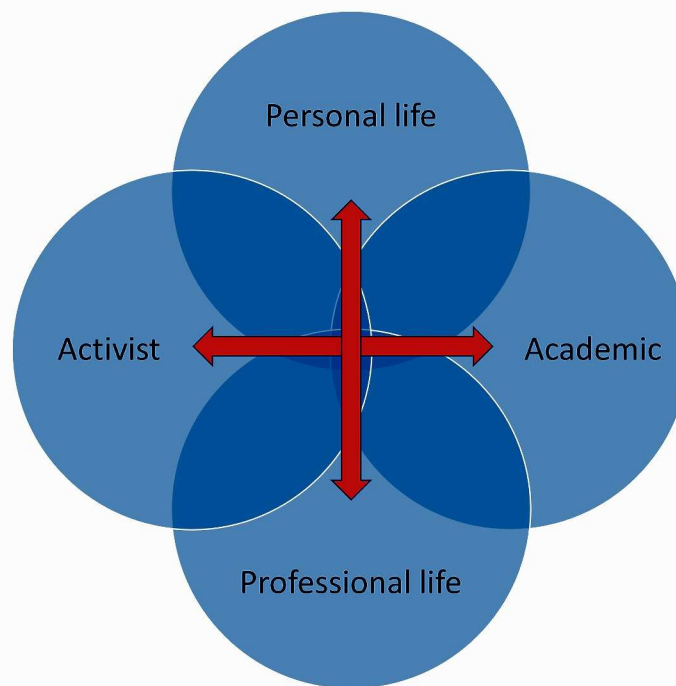


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Throughout this booklet, all contributions of the different authors are centered around two axes of struggle:

1. The first one is the perceived dichotomy between an activist and an academic. If academics remain to be seen as objective experts, and activists as engaged civilians, however often seen as lacking the necessary knowledge, and for sure without the necessary support, we are left with an unequal debate and an unrealistic portrayal of research and activism. The contributions throughout this edition will show how intrinsically linked our roles as academics and activists are when doing research on identity.
2. A second perceived dichotomy, is the one between a personal and a professional life. When doing research on identity, our research influences us as much as we influence our research. Indeed, “the politics of identity” is personal. Drawing the line between our personal and professional life is not only impossible, it is also unhelpful. Being involved in research on identity and a commitment in identity politics shapes, questions, challenges, and redefines our own identity formation and touches upon the researcher’s body in a multitude of ways. We can be a researcher and an activist, but we are also a father, a daughter, a lover, ... with our own social location and background, our own interests and ideas, and our own feelings, behavior and identity. Yet again, combining these different roles is not always easy and does not always have mutual advantages.

Structure and outline

Throughout the booklet, the two axes of struggles will be the main thread. The different contributions are divided into three themed sections.

The first themed section is called **“On shaky grounds: academics and activists in transnational and local politics”**, in which we hear from academics and activists navigating local and transnational politics. This section is very much in line with the key note lecture by Ico Maly (in this booklet transformed into a summary through the eyes of Marion Wasserbauer) and deals with the false binaries of academics as those who draw from knowledge and activists as those who draw from experiences. As such, the different contributions not only show how unhelpful this binary is, they also challenge the university as the main (and only) center of knowledge production. Through cases in queer activist movements in Greece (Dimitra Georgiadou), the Rosia Montana protests in Romania (Maria Neag) and research on undocumented migrants in the Netherlands (Kolar Aparna), the different authors show the potential of an alternative approach, but also its limitations and possible struggles, while also reflecting and posing questions that need to be raised when crossing geographical and figurative borders.

“The good and the bad sex researcher? The struggle over where to draw the line in academia and activism” is the second themed section. The title of the section is a direct hint towards the work of Gayle Rubin (1984) in which she investigated which sexual behaviors are seen as good/natural while others are bad/unnatural. If there is a moral line between good and bad sex, is there such a thing as the good and bad sex researcher? In the evening lecture (in this booklet presented as a graphic short story through comments and illustrations by Maarten Loopmans), Janice Irvine explains the concept of the “speaker’s burden”, where the researcher on sex(uality) faces strong moral judgements about their personal and professional lives. The stories within this themed section indeed illustrate the personal struggles of researchers on sexuality. Remarkable but maybe unsurprising: it is exactly in this section that we had more difficulties to convince our speakers on the workshop

to write down their stories and make it more accessible to a broader audience. Two amazingly good stories are therefore absent, as it became too difficult for the speakers to open up. As compared to the spoken word, these written stories will stick, on paper or the world wide web, where we lose control over what happens with our words and who reads along. We sincerely respect the decisions not to publish, yet they serve as a timely reminder how high the thresholds can be to speak freely and challenge the stigma that many sex researchers still face. The stories by Gert Hekma and Stijn Deklerck indeed show how difficult and complex researching sexuality might be. Further on in the booklet, ten propositions by Bart Eeckhout shed light on the different aspects of academic and activist work on sexuality in Belgium.

Where the previous sections have been dealing mainly with an insider's perspective, we dedicate the final themed section called **“Academia and activism – (re)working privilege?”** to issues of outsidersness and privilege. Indeed, this section zeroes in on the political, moral, ethical, epistemological, methodological, and emotional aspects of dealing with a privileged position as an academic investigating minority groups to which you don't belong. However, being privileged as a white researcher with documents (when researching undocumented migrants in Greece) or as a hearing academic (when doing research on the deaf community in UK) does not guarantee a fully privileged position, as those same researchers, Afra Dekie and Laurine Groux-Moreau, are facing academic challenges too in terms of institutional and/or financial support. Indeed, speaking from this position demands for an even more careful approach of how to undertake such an endeavor, always questioning where you speak from and who you speak to. Both researchers are left with questions of what constitutes an academic or an activist, but are also actively looking for (innovative) ways to let those often silent/silenced voices be heard.

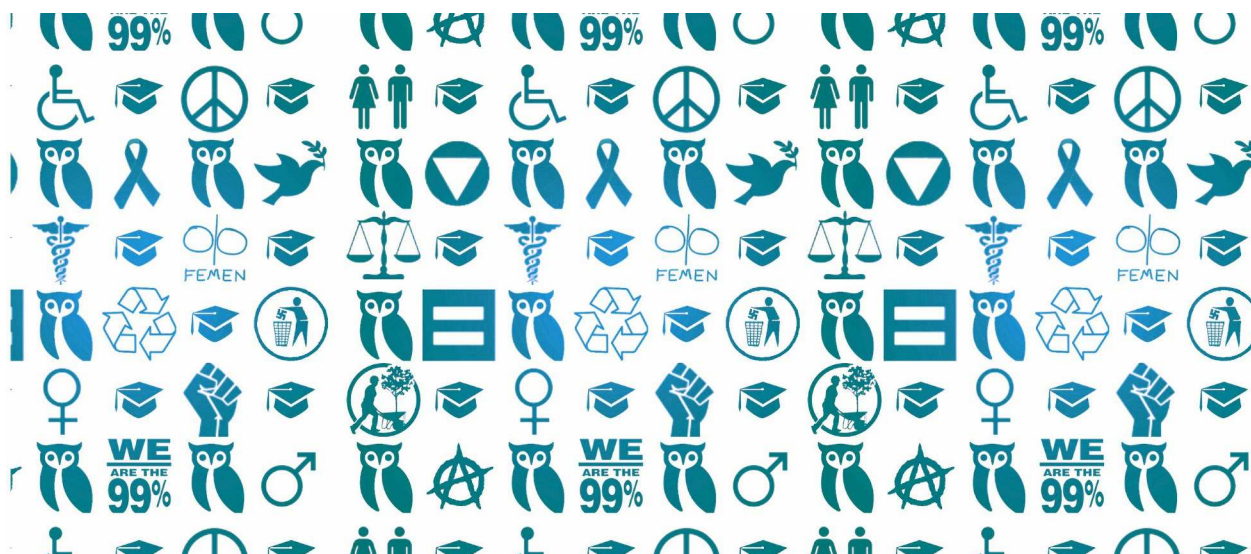
An interlude of **“Queer arts as activism”** completes the contributions to our workshop and booklet. Stepping outside their usual roles of being an academic and being a dramaturge, our two contributors Lukasz Szulc and Selm Wenselaers become a film director and live performer. Both of them explore watching and performing gender in very different ways.

Acknowledgments

The idea for the workshop and the reflections in this booklet is not new, nor is it solely ours. It is an idea that has grown slowly but steadily when reflecting on our own struggles or speaking to colleagues who are facing similar difficulties. The idea as presented in this workshop and booklet is the result of many conversations, fueled by an indignation towards the neglect of alternative knowledges and knowledge production, a resilience to conform to certain hegemonic views and a strong belief that change is possible. The summary of that process can be found here, but the credit goes to everyone who has contributed to the formation of the idea. Parts of this text are written by Maarten Loopmans when developing the initial outline of the workshop, and the whole text has been written with the support of Marion Wasserbauer.

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On shaky grounds: academics and activists in transnational and local politics



PHOTO BY VICTORIA COFFEY

“*Young academics today are nomadic subjects*”

In this first session of short stories, we will hear from and about academics and activists navigating local and transnational politics. All of our speakers' stories somehow relate to crossing geographical and figurative borders, touching on the subjects of migration, protests, field work and theory versus practice.

inclusive ::
responsive
anticipatory
reflexive

and action!



Between theory and practice: Contesting binary logic in activism

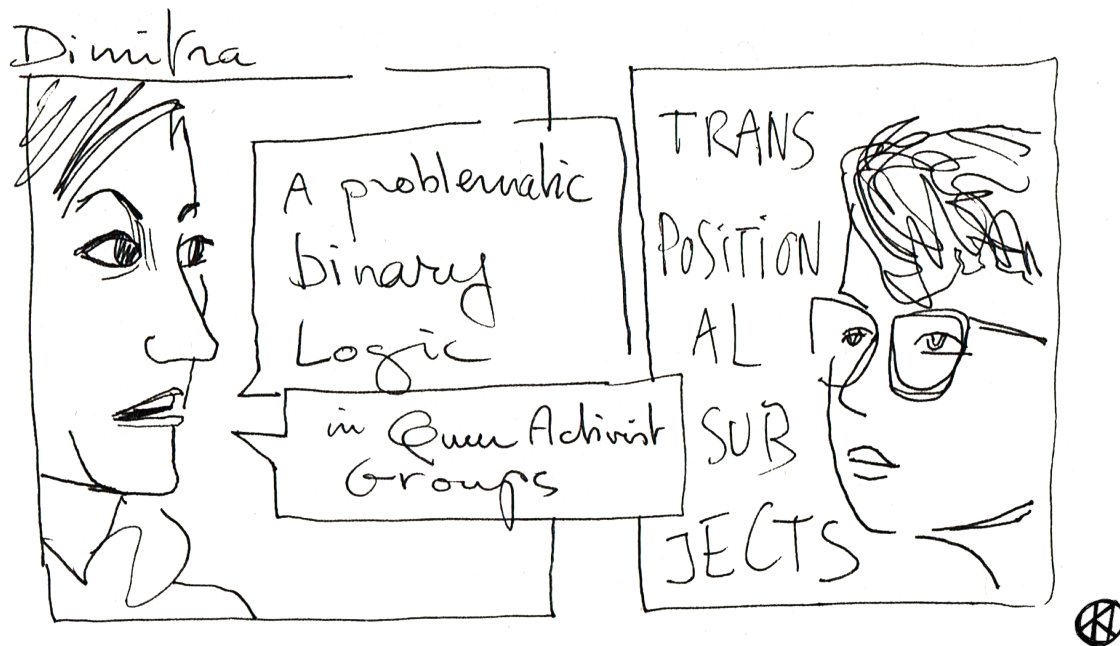
DIMITRA GEORGIADOU

In December 2008, the fifteen-year-old boy and young anarchist Alexis Grigoropoulos was shot dead by police in the centre of the Exarchia area, where Athens's anarchist hub lies. What followed was the massive outburst of a large number of people of different underprivileged social categories who expressed a general outrage against the sovereign state and authoritative policies. It was shortly after the breaking out of the Greek debt crisis and the announcement and implementation of the first harsh austerity measures. The neo-fascist organisation Golden Dawn started gaining power as a political party, and violent xenophobic, homophobic and transphobic attacks spread the fear. However, at the same time, new social movements emerged; first and foremost, the anti-fascist movement which incorporated, at least in the beginning, social activists and young academics with no obvious or clear cut links to the far left. In fact, it was in about the same period that LGBT rights activism raised a powerful voice against homophobia and sexual discrimination. However, one could only notice the lack of a separate, strong, inclusive, intersectional feminist movement, fragments of which operated individually within the wider leftist movement. My impression is that in today's grassroots politics of Athens, it is mainly the LGBT movement that provides a safe space for the production and articulation of a strong feminist agenda.

This relationship of course is linear as well as complementary. The LGBT movement may owe its political and theoretical foundations to feminism; however, it is lesbian, bisexual and trans individuals that draw from and make use of contemporary feminist and queer theory in order to empower the politics of identity (Segal, 2008). This issue is exactly what I would like to discuss: what sorts of conflicts arise by the "good" or "bad" use of theory; and who is considered eligible to bring theory into the movement and to claim good use of theory for the movement. By addressing these questions I refer to the conflicts emerging on the grounds of theory, between activists and academics who participate in the movement as socially engaged researchers (D' Arcy, 2015).

The introduction of Women's-, and later, Gender studies in the Social Sciences departments in Greece enabled many young intellectuals and early stage PhD students to engage in social research. Within this historical, context they are almost unavoidably brought closer to a more participatory intervention and in a position to critically reflect on and cross-examine real-life practices through theory. In the same way, activists with years of experience in the grassroots political arena may turn a rather reluctant eye towards high theory, often accusing it of complexity and elitism. One however wonders if there are any real boundaries between academic activists and non-academic activists, or between theory and practice at all. Can successful or unsuccessful use of theories in certain contexts simply justify aphorisms that strip feminisms of those powerful tools that allow them the degree of reflexivity and accountability they need in order to sustain themselves (Milevska, 2011)?

Standpoint theory argues that position, context and experience matters. However, by not contesting this fixation with position - of those who draw from knowledge as opposed to those who draw from experience - it seems as though we acknowledge the discourses produced in the university as the only legitimate knowledge at hand. Strategic use of positionality, however, means that issues should not be addressed outside historical and cultural context and that statements should have the right to be voiced as knowledge grounded neither on experience nor identity, and yet be equally trusted to make politics beside them (Mohanty, 1995).



In today's context, identity politics have been substituted by a more fragmented and dislocated queer and transnational subjectivity where even the definition of class cannot be taken for granted (Braidotti, 1994). The notion of borders, lines and definitions leaves very little space for the expression of those subjective trans-positionalities, those radical states-in-between, life narratives that don't fit to the prescribed or perceived patterns of existing. So where do (feminist) academics, in the general sense, fit in (feminist) activism? They fit exactly as transpositional subjects. We tend to forget that, like all people, they actually multitask real everyday lives; and that living these multifaceted lives is constitutive of their identity. The traumas and inconsistencies emerging from the - not so personal - inability to fit into an elusive normativity, are to a degree constitutive of both the field of research as well as the field of struggle. In many cases, these two coincide.

Young academics today are nomadic subjects in the full sense of Braidotti's definition of what constitutes a nomadic subjectivity. They cross geographical and intellectual boundaries, they change institutions, they can be visitors in their own country; they may even stick to activist work for as long as their research lasts. They speak or are expected to speak (in) a multiplicity of languages, and they are expected to think and produce data in a multilevel scale (Braidotti, 1994). In the sense that many Greek anthropologists work on crisis-related issues, this shows a kind of nomadism related to attachment;

which according to Toynbee is attachment to a hostile place that one never refuses to abandon completely (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The crisis deems them deterritorialized subjects, in a Guattarian sense: displaced and diasporic. The majority of young Greek intellectuals do not even enjoy the benefits of class consciousness as in quite some cases their intellectual capital does not coincide with their almost destitute financial situation. They are often accused of constructing hierarchies in the movement; however, I don't see how academic knowledge can still be deemed so prestigious when academia itself can no longer secure the exchangeable value of knowledge. And prestige is linked directly to this exchangeable value. In other words, when activism enters the university grounds, boundaries blur severely.

In defence of a hybrid academic-activist trans-position as a radical, critical in-between-ness in the realm of feminism where theory and practice inform each other, my idea is that criticism should remain the primary tool for feminism to sustain itself against self-absorption. Inspired by people literally nomadic, the nomadism in question here refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of existing. There is nothing immaterial in the production of theory. Politically engaged research has the ability to bring change and upturn prevailing certainties and, in this sense, it has all the potential to transform into revolutionary practice.

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United, we save Rosia Montana: an environmental protest with an identity twist

MARIA NEAG

Using images and quotes, this story aims to explain the links that developed between academics, cultural elites, Diaspora, activism, ideals and identity, all in the context of the protests against Roşia Montană, a gold mine project that might or might not happen in Romania. It highlights the legal, economic, political and civic effects of these protests as well as the national and international echoes. The Roşia Montană protests had novel forms of expression varying from non-violent street rallies in Romania's major cities and abroad, classical music concerts, workshops, human chains, inspirational videos, creative contests, music festivals, ad-hoc Facebook activities etc. It resembled the 1989 Revolution in terms of crowd and it brought with it a feeling of solidarity, unity, inviting people of all ages and social layers to participate in a common ideal of making Romania a better place in the future. It was a wake-up protest with meaningful civic and identity-related aspects creating a debate on national identity bound to be challenged by the emerging realities of Europeanization and globalisation.

Why this story?

This story is a follow up of my presentation for the Workshop “*Academia and identity – when research meets activism*”, organised by colleagues from KU Leuven, University of Antwerp, University of Gent and ULB at STUK, in Leuven on 16 March 2015. It includes some of the reflections developed during the workshop. The story refers to a series of protests against a cyanide mining pit that would open in Romania, creating the largest cyanide lake in Europe, and 'melting' four mountains and several small villages. Although supported by the Romanian political class and some local villagers (benefiting from the relocation scheme), the mining project did not fly for all the Romanians.

I first became intrigued by the Roşia Montană (RM) project while the European Parliament was debating on the use of cyanide. On 5

May 2010 a European Parliament resolution was adopted on the ban on use of cyanide mining technologies (P7_TA (2010)0145), invoking EU's objectives (i.e. protect water resources and biological diversity under the Water Framework Directive).

The topic of environmentally unfriendly mining projects also came out while preparing my PhD thesis “*Representations of Romania in the European Institutional Setting*”, an oral history research capturing European officials' image and perceptions about Romania's history and present role within EU. Some interlocutors mentioned the 2000 Baia Mare cyanide spill into the Someş River reaching Tisza and the Danube, which caused adverse environmental effects and affected neighbouring Hungary and Serbia. Their perception was that Romania is a natural resource rich country where politicians can't safeguard environmental sustainability.

Activism, academia and identity

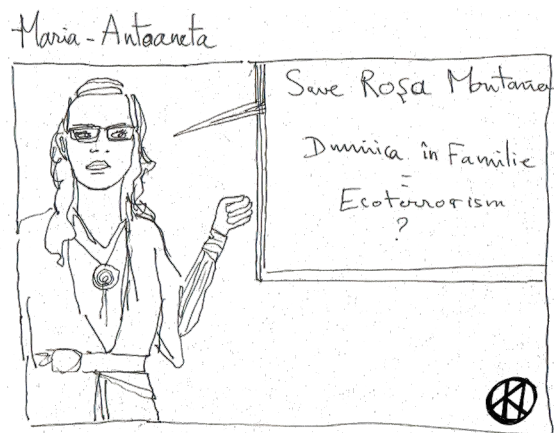
Although based on scientific rigour, academia can still be biased because of the curriculum and topics covered, professors and researchers' background, research methods etc. There is a link between academia and identity and this was the topic debated at the workshop "*Academia and identity – when research meets activism*".

Trying to frame my story in a field and methodology, I will mention several concepts, highlighting the broader ongoing research: social geography (Hamnett, 1996; Panelli, 2003; Valentine, 2001), non-violent direct action (Sharp, 2005), social corporate responsibility, critical reflection (Rose, 1997), reflexivity (Aldrige, 1998; Blomley, 1994; Katz, 1994, 1998; Roberts, 2000), critical engagement, the links and boundaries between activism and academia (Maxley 1999). The interdisciplinary approach is welcome as it provides a wider view on the subject-matter.

Reoccurring tensions between academia and activism relate to the language and concepts, the perception and understanding of the problem as well as the timeframe. Debating is a healthy exercise and can also lead to solidarity. The gender debate is an example of the conviviality between research and activism fighting for policy change. Another example is the environmental debate and this is where Roşia Montană protests stand in the case of Romania.

Romania has a troublesome history, being on the borderline of many empires and facing pressure on its identity. Communism left traumas, still visible. Many people are silent, not standing up for their rights and not challenging enough the political discourse. Romanians' shy or under-developed civic and critical spirit can be explained by the systematic destruction of the cultural and political elite and the

repression used during communism. In his "*Psychology of the Romanian People*" (1937), Constantin Rădulescu Motru speaks about historical traumas and how the Romanian people have not yet lived their identity climax. He also argues that the vocation or "calling" is a decisive factor in peoples' culture. Romanians are not yet aware of their vocation which explains their feeling of incompleteness and their under-achievement. The rise of activism and civic movements over the summer of 2013 (i.e. Roşia Montană, stray dogs, anti-corruption, anti-government, Gay Fest) is a new reality. To my mind, the process of identity reshaping has already begun. Academia and activism play an important role in this sense.



What is Roşia Montană ['roʃi.a mon 'tanə]?

In Alba County in the Apuseni Mountains of western Transylvania, Romania, lies one of Europe's largest gold deposits; it contains 140 kilometres of underground galleries from the Dacian pre-Roman period. Massive gold and silver deposits can be found alongside other rare minerals, including titanium, germanium and wolfram – with a global value surpassing that of the gold. This impressive deposit is among the only remaining ones in Europe outside the ownership or exploitation of important international mining companies.

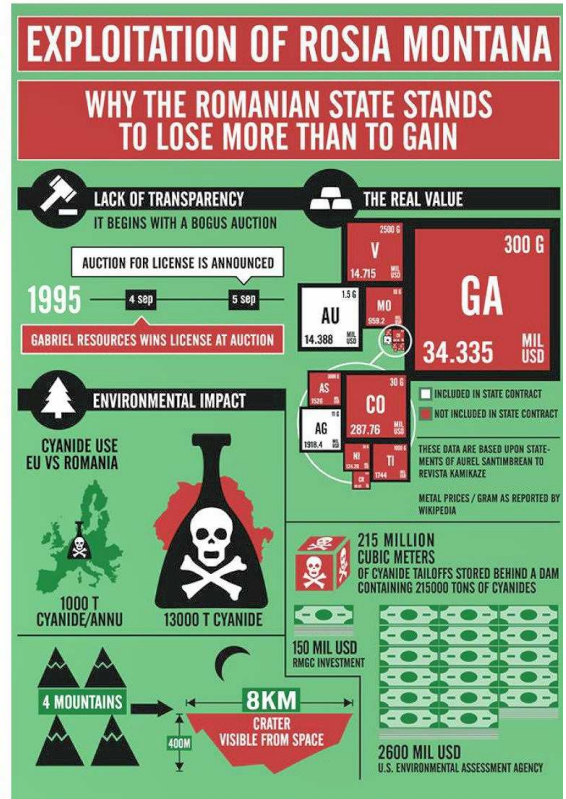


Image 1: Roșia Montană area, the gold gallery and possible environmental threats
Source: own design with images from online platforms

Established in 1997, Roşia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC) has as shareholders the mining state company Minvest Roşia Montană S.A (19.31%) and Gabriel Resources (80.69%) - a Canadian TSX-listed (GBU.TSX) resource company, focusing on developing a mining project in Roşia Montană, to be exploited for its 10.1 million ounces of gold and 47.6 million ounces of silver (evaluation by RMGC).

What's at stake?

The arguments in favour of this mining project relate to the company's claims of environmental responsibility (i.e. cleaning the waste and waters, restoring the historical landmarks). The Romanian state would earn a 4% royalty of the gold and silver exploitation (to be increased to 6% through pending Romanian Parliament legislation). With regards to the 90% unemployment in the region, the mining project would allegedly generate 3,000 direct jobs and other opportunities for local business. The supporters of the project include the political class, media, mining workers and local administrations.

On the negative side, the environmental 'costs' of the gold mine project imply that four mountains and some small villages would disappear, creating the largest cyanide lake in Europe (600 hectares) with 12,000 tonnes of cyanide waste yearly for a duration of 16 years. Among the opponents of the project are some local peasants, activists, academia, Romanian Orthodox Church, NGOs, artists, environmentalists, engineers, retired, unemployed people, aspiring politicians, public figures, Romanians abroad etc. Resistance has been voiced for the last 14 years but the imminent adoption of a mining law designed to facilitate the expropriation in view of the kick-start of the RM project triggered a series of non-violent protests in

September 2013.

After a harsh austerity period (slashing public wages, pensions and social provisions), which questioned the remaining Romanian solidarity, the Roşia Montană gold mining project steered the debate, creating a ripple effect that spread to the Romanian "new-born" activists abroad. It was the first time in Romania when protesters had such an articulated opinion about a project of national interest. There were protests in approximately 50 cities across Romania and 30 cities in the diaspora (e.g., London, Berlin, Munich, Paris, Brussels, Vienna, Copenhagen, Washington, Toronto etc.). The protests against the Roşia Montană project lasted until February 2014 but one can say they are still ongoing for a number of different causes.

The concerns related to the use of cyanide, the threat of destruction of local ecosystem and landscape, historical and archaeological monuments – potentially UNESCO site, the unclear environmental situation post-exploitation, governmental attempts to intervene in justice and law-making, dismissing opponents, keeping secrecy and bias around the project - suspicions of political bribery, fake documentation, claims of “undermining national economy” - low royalties and unprofitable terms of contract for the Romanian state, doubts about the alleged job creation and the job sustainability in the area after the closing down of the project, the officials' indifference and arrogant attitude, lack of media coverage, pro-mining propaganda and the need for structured debate were among the causes of the protests.

Creative protests “*The Romanian autumn*”

With the help of new media, Facebook and good networking and communication, marches were held

every week under the slogan “Sundays with the family” or “We are all 1” (on the occasion of Romania's national day celebrated on 1st of December). Smart and resourceful forms of non-violent protests included street rally in major cities of Romania and abroad, flash-mobs, online activism, human chains, classical music concerts, workshops, inspirational videos, documentaries, support messages from abroad, creative contests, music festivals, bicycle protests, petitions, open letters, providing a very insightful case in the framework of

Gene Sharp's work on innovative non-violent direct action (1973; 2003; 2005). September 2013 was the peak in terms of crowd numbers, 15 September bringing approximately 25.000 people, according to protesters (according to the media, only a few thousand).



Image 2: Mash-up of pictures encapsulating the the Roșia Montană protests

Source: own design with photos from online platforms

Protesters' profile

Protesters came from diverse social strata and had a wide age range – students, families with children, and retired people. Intelligent slogans and word games were omnipresent online and during the protests, pointing to the fact that the protests were mostly educated people. Information materials were available for the wider public, on printed and electronic support including information about the RM project, advice on what to bring to a protest and how to protect oneself against state abuse (quoting the citizens' rights to demonstrate democratically, as laid down in the Constitution).

Many movements could be identified in the crowds, including ecologists, anarchists, anti-capitalists, conservatives, libertarians, nationalists, conspiracy theorists, and people claiming no affiliations. Although there were many anti-capitalists, having regard to the outcomes of presidential elections, one might conclude that the political profile of the protester would be mostly centre-right oriented.

Although there were many online platforms and some popular protesters, there were no official leaders. The events could be described as individual actions in a collective framework, a people to people campaign; the Romanians abroad organised flash mobs and streets rallies and sent support pictures, letters and petitions through social media channels. To name just a few online stakeholders: Uniți Salvăm, Rosia Montana in UNESCO World Heritage, Militia Spirituala, Casa Jurnalistului, Rezistența Urbană, Alburnus Maior, Think Outside the Box, Mai Mult Verde, Pentru Apa Curata si Contra Fracturare Hidraulica, România fără Cianură / Cyanide free Romania, Adoptă o Casă la Roșia Montană, Enough already, stopfracturare.ro, WWF,

Greenpeace Romania, etc.

The academia stood close to the protesters issuing open letters, public stands and assessments regarding the mining project and the economic, historical and local consequences, for the area and for the Romanian heritage. Besides the cultural implications and being transformed from a natural montaneous area into an industrial one, natural resources dating back to Dacian and Roman period are to be exhausted in 16 years of exploitation with only a 4% yield; moreover, many rare minerals present in the mines, such as titanium, germanium and wolfram were not included in the RMGC project), thus bringing prejudice to the state income and to the cultural and historical welfare.

In the context of the Arab Spring, Occupy movement, protests in Spain, Greece and Turkey, the protests against the RM mining were considered the 'Romanian autumn'. International solidarity was shown for the RM. During the protests, similar causes were invoked and supported (i.e. Košice, Kremenica, Skouries). There was a lot of communication and cooperation with international organisation, NGOs and to some extent, there was more international press coverage than national. Many events, happenings, conferences, briefings on blogs, book launches, movie festivals (e.g., *Making Waves. New Romanian cinema*, New York) took place abroad.

Despite its visibility, the messages of the protests were not exclusively about Roșia Montană. Besides the green messages - protecting the environment, warnings about cyanide, calls for respecting biodiversity and landscape, there were also calls against the government, for anti-corruption etc.

Outcomes of the protests

The protests had many consequences, but three strike me as the most relevant: (1) legal and economic, (2) political and (3) civic effects.

The protests prevented the adoption of a mining law drafted to favour RMGC. Furthermore, a parliamentary oversight commission on the subject of Roșia Montană was created. There were positive effects of economic nature for the area (i.e. boost of local economy) as the whole area is in a rebranding process as a touristic and bio-sustainable region. Although leading to the preservation of natural resources which would not have been properly exploited with the RMGC project, the protests led to the loss of allegedly up to 7000 future jobs. The temporary freezing of the mining project pushed the corporation to currently seek redress from the Romanian state for the investment done so far. Many fear the Trans-Atlantic Trade Partnership will be invoked for suing the Romanian state.

The political effects relate to the dismissal of certain political figures, the fall in popularity of the socialist (S&D) government (although the contract was signed with the overall approval of the political class – including the centre-right). The political parties speculated and shared the protesters' electorate which proved to have centre-right prevalence. During the Romanian presidential elections in the autumn of 2014, due to the strong social bonds created with the Romanian Diaspora, there were a series of protests against the poor organisation of the elections abroad - people cuing for hours to vote, many being deprived of the right to vote after a whole day of waiting. Social media helped create solidarity, leading to an increased turnout at the polls and the subsequent victory of Klaus Iohannis, a Romanian of German ethnic

origin. Raised awareness about the RM project, fracking, corruption and clientelism in politics can be counted among the civic effects. The cyanide debate was linked to the fracking issue, many protests being conducted in parallel. These were the biggest and most meaningful post-1989 protests. New social media actors, causes, brands, hash tags and discussions were born. These protests created a civic spirit rather absent prior to the 2013 events, understood as participatory democracy and increased demands for the rule of law. Subsequently, many new causes appeared calling for politicians' responsibility and accountability, culminating with the resignation of PM Ponta and other leading figures in November 2015, held responsible alongside the corrupted political class for the death and serious injury of many young people during a tragic fire accident (Colectiv Club, Bucharest).

Among the most notable achievements of the protests were the development of an intergeneration and intersocial status solidarity, the seed of a public debate about Romania's economic and political state of play, image and identity and the "awakening" of a different type of activism.

I wonder if one can read the Roșia Montană protests, unifying different layers of society for a common cause, in the key of identity reshaping, redefining the Romanian vocation mentioned earlier, if it's a ripple of the international anti-establishment protests or if it's rather a Romanian civil awakening. However, Roșia Montană had emotional connotations, some Romanians protesting because they felt their roots were being threatened. The old Dacian-Roman mines risk to be destroyed by the project. This was perceived as both too capitalist (in the sense that a whole region will vanish for the purpose of digging out all the precious metals over a 16 years-period) and not capitalist enough (in the

IA

A black and white photograph of a woman in traditional Albanian dress. She is wearing a white headscarf (fustanella) with a dark band. Her blouse is white with dark, intricate embroidery on the sleeves and neckline. She is also wearing a dark skirt with a wide, patterned belt. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

A composite of four black and white photographs of Queen Victoria. From left to right: 1. Queen Victoria standing in a doorway, wearing a white mourning dress with a high collar and long sleeves. 2. A profile portrait of Queen Victoria wearing an ornate crown and a heavy, jeweled necklace. 3. Queen Victoria seated, wearing a white mourning dress with a high collar and long sleeves, holding a small object in her hands. 4. A portrait of Queen Victoria wearing a white mourning dress with a high collar and long sleeves, and a white veil.

A 3x3 grid of nine images illustrating various forms of sculpture and art. The top row features a large, ornate terracotta vase with geometric patterns, a woman in a white, form-fitting dress posing elegantly, and a white, abstract sculpture of a head with large, almond-shaped eyes. The middle row shows a dramatic seascape with a bird in flight, a person in a large, shaggy, brown costume holding a wooden staff, and a collection of small, brown, abstract sculptures arranged in a circular pattern. The bottom row includes a close-up of a coiled, reddish-brown object, a person in a shaggy costume standing in a snowy landscape, and a group of white swans in flight.

23

industry and lifestyle.

Whereto?

Activists use research for evidence in their causes while academia provides activism with analytical tools to determine its effectiveness. Activist-oriented research has many critics because of claims of subjectivity and political agendas. Subjectivity is the lapse of any social science research but this can be addressed by clearly defining the limits of the research through a comprehensive disclaimer.

The present story highlights the existing link between activism, academia, public opinion and policy making. If this link is somewhat dysfunctional and even interrupted, beyond the purpose of this story although a valid question remains: What is the key to translating research or activism into policies?

While activists call on policy makers to tackle issues (often facing repression from the "system"), the academia has slower reactions to public concerns because of its nature, the thoroughness and the language required for the research. To some extent, this story breaks the academic rigour, being more a reflection than a self-standing thesis.

In telling the story of an environmental protest with an identity twist, I stand as a researcher aware of political and economic aspects, as well as activists' claims and stakeholders' responses. I heard the pros and cons in the debates in the European Parliament, read about similar mining project and the reactions in other countries, I learned about alternative ways of protesting, observed and participated in rallies to capture the atmosphere for the purpose of my research. It is undeniable that I have my own views on the events but the present story has the humble intention of

presenting and putting under debate how an environmental protest connected so many stakeholders and if its actual roots were not deeper than Roşia Montană per se, but were in fact related to the need for a debate on identity. This is a possible explanation why the protests were so creative, colourful, geographically spread and included participants from so many different backgrounds and social strata. They carried a different message, a call for a much-needed debate on reshaping identity and the country's current system. If in this story I went too far or too little, I apologize to the reader saying this is but one aspect of a more generous story.

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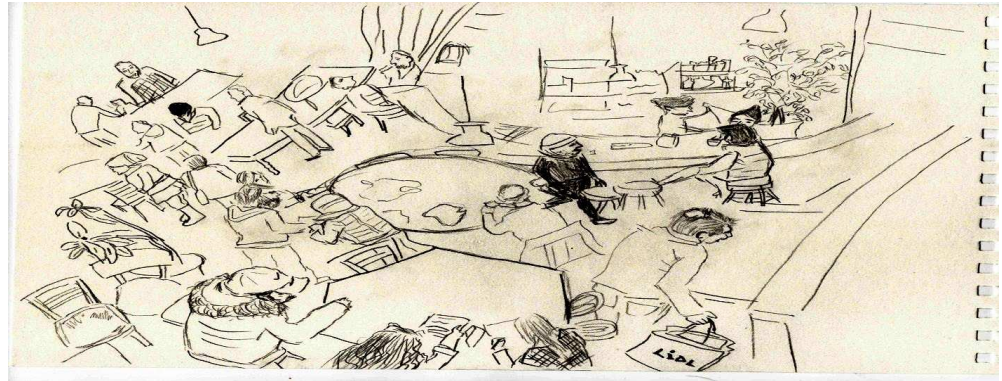
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Warm Wednesdays and another day

KOLAR APARNA



"Yes, let's look at welcome spaces in Nijmegen for undocumented migrants...", agreed Anitha and Jelle. Anitha was still struggling to find a job in the university while Jelle had a position as an assistant professor but wanted somehow to keep his conversations with Anitha going. So they decided to initiate a research project without any funding, but nevertheless driven by their interests to link university thinking to other spaces in the city. *"It would be interesting indeed to collaborate with local support organisations for undocumented migrants and see how the borders of Europe towards 'undocumented migrants' is being tackled here locally."* As researchers on borders and migration Anitha was recently back after intensive fieldwork at the U.S./ Mexico border in Tijuana and Jelle himself had for his PhD travelled across sub-Saharan Africa and parts of the Spain(EU)/Morocco border. They were excited now to make 'local' connections and do 'fieldwork' locally rather than travelling far. And so emails were sent, phone calls were made, a proposal was written, and much discussions on theoretical, ethical and methodological issues were debated, and they were finally welcomed by some members of the local support organisation for 'undocumented migrants', Stichting Vriend, to conduct their 'research project'.

It began with the two of them attending the weekly meetings in the cafe of the local organisation, their so-called 'activism' or 'active engagement' outside the walls of the university. Every Wednesday they would cycle back speaking of how each time these cafe meetings were so different because of the improvised and voluntary nature of the organisation and the diversity of people present. They spoke of the organisational structure and issues of formalising such an informal organisation. They spoke of narratives they had heard or collected on various issues such as detention brutality, mobile networks of asylum in Netherlands, and risks of crossing 'dangerous' borders etc. They felt like there were so many stories to be told and to be heard.

For Anitha, she felt that she had become more aware of her own identity as a migrant and how her skin colour and gender, and, most importantly, how 'Others' perceived her highly influenced the conversations she had and what people chose to share with her or not. She felt she was able to pass through space and

connect to people in a way that was special. This Wednesday especially she had managed to enter into a conversation with a guy who seemed especially reserved, shy and silent with the rest, but felt comfortable speaking to her and seemed to open up to her. This made her feel that she did have some special social skills to doing 'fieldwork', especially on a sensitive topic such as undocumented migration. As she was leaving the cafe, she saw him cycling in the same direction so she joined him. He was happy to see her. *"Are you also headed in the direction of the University?"*, she asked. *"Ja...Shall we walk together?"*, *"Ja...sure..."*, she replied getting off her cycle. *"So...How long have you been in Netherlands?"*, Anitha asked him without knowing how to begin this conversation. *"Six years...."*, he replied without any eye contact. He rarely made eye contact with her, but when he did it appeared as if he was uncomfortable or blushing in awkwardness. *"How did you come to the Netherlands... By flight? Or...?"*, she proceeded, feeling herself awkward as soon as she posed the question wondering if this was a rather big jump to a very personal experience that might be traumatic or too personal to share so soon. *"I went from Iraq to Turkey and then I stayed there and began to work and stuff... and then I heard there that Netherlands is good for people from Iraq... and so I came here... I came in one of those... I don't know how you call them in Dutch... (pointing to a big truck). I came in one of those."*, he replied with quick ease and norm. *"Ok..."* *"Maybe we could go for a tea someday and talk, what do you think, huh?"*, Anitha asked hoping to hear more of his stories in the future. He smiled. They parted ways as she had to cycle straight on in the direction of the university and his house was to the right in a neighbourhood that she had never been to. His name was Nazar but she had heard so many new names and faces that day that she was not sure if she would remember his name. Days went by and before she knew it her so-called 'research project' was becoming more than just 'objective research'. Friendships began developing and also just the rhythm of entering the warm cafe to familiar and unfamiliar faces every week became addictive. She began waiting for Wednesdays because something had changed since she began this project, but she was not sure what exactly. It was something about the social dynamics of the cafe and the people coming there, but also the sense of being actively involved in a space outside the university. The cafe served as an important reflective space where she could link the theories debated in university to more practical dynamics and to 'real space', which made her feel that she was on to something she wanted to do.



***Is it that because I myself am a migrant, I have
'more/less authority' in researching issues of migration?***

She next met Nazar in the collective garden, another initiative of the local stichting. The garden was a place where inhabitants, and especially undocumented migrants, are welcome to work and in return they are given some allowance and vegetables for free. Today they were busy digging out potatoes deep in the soil. Hussain, the friendly guy who was always welcoming and shaking hands with people at the entrance of the cafe, confessed his plans of cooking aaloo gosht that night with the potatoes he would take home. As she was leaving, like always, Anitha shook hands with everyone and also with Nazar. He told her eagerly to wait for him as he was also done

and headed in the direction of the station. And so they were walking again.

"Do you have contact with your family?", asked Anitha again not knowing how to start a conversation. "No..." ...
"You don't want to keep in touch with your family?" she continued intuitively. He replied in the affirmative. She then tried to share with him her own personal struggles within familial relations. She also shared with him the recent news of her uncle who passed away very suddenly in a minor bike accident. She tried to use their conversation about family as an excuse to reflect on how unpredictable life is. But on these matters Nazar was much more aware of than Anitha. He suddenly looked at her and said, "Yes, life is too short... I don't know if I will be here tomorrow or not..." He paused for sometime and added, "Would you like to have children?". It was one of the first moments that this otherwise very shy person was making a powerful eye contact with her. Anitha did not know how to respond. She really did not expect this question, but she had to remind herself that fieldwork can never be predicted. But she had to respond, and so she stumbled and said, "No... no..."

They were now walking through the shopping streets that were crowded with people. They passed by some parents with children and Nazar seemed particularly keen to make eye contact or interact with the children. As he tried to smile at a passing child, he commented that here in Nijmegen people get offended if strangers are friendly with their children whereas in Iraq it was very normal for strangers to interact with children in public spaces. Today Nazar was in a more friendly and dreamy mood. He invited Anitha for tea as they arrived near the station. She accepted since her train was only in the next 45 minutes. They went to the top floor of a shopping mall. They chose their tea bags and went to the counter for warm water. He told her that this practice of tea is very odd because he is used to having tea from a collective tea pot, always boiling in a corner. Nazar insisted on paying the bill. This was something Anitha was not used to because she always at least volunteered or negotiated of splitting or paying part of the bill. He was offended because he had invited her. And so he paid the bill and they found a comfortable corner to continue their talks. As they sat down and started sipping the tea, he asked her to roll up her sleeves. Anitha was a bit taken aback but she followed, she rolled up the sleeves of her shirt a bit above her wrist. He told her that in Iraq women take away body hair very early and so it's rather uncommon to see body hair of women in public. Anitha rolled back her sleeves down and said that for her it's just very painful to remove body hair and so she tries to avoid it as much. He told her that he would like to travel to India with her. This was where Anitha felt the need to communicate to him that she is already in a relationship. "*Ja we could travel together to India but my partner will join us... so the three of us*", she underlined. He said that he wanted to travel only with her and not with anyone else. Anitha began feeling awkward from then on. They continued conversing on topics related to his choice of coming to the Netherlands and her choices for the same. They both agreed that they like Nijmegen as a city. However, she was getting uncomfortable. So she looked at the time and made the excuse that she had to return to a meeting in the university. He volunteered to cycle back with her to the Uni. She could not say no. As they cycled he told her that the previous days he had been writing her name all over the walls of his room. She could not believe what she was hearing. At the same time, she could not dismiss his remark as a joke either, because she hardly knew Nazar enough to conclude either way. But she felt awkward and felt like she had to say something to communicate her feelings strongly. But she did not know what her feelings were in the first place. So she went for, "*Please behave normally... I am your friend but I am married and you have to respect this, ya?*". Looking away, he responded, "Ja, what is

'normal?'. They arrived at the cycle parking in the Uni campus. Nazar gave his mobile number to Anitha and asked her to call him. They parted ways as she ran into the Campus.

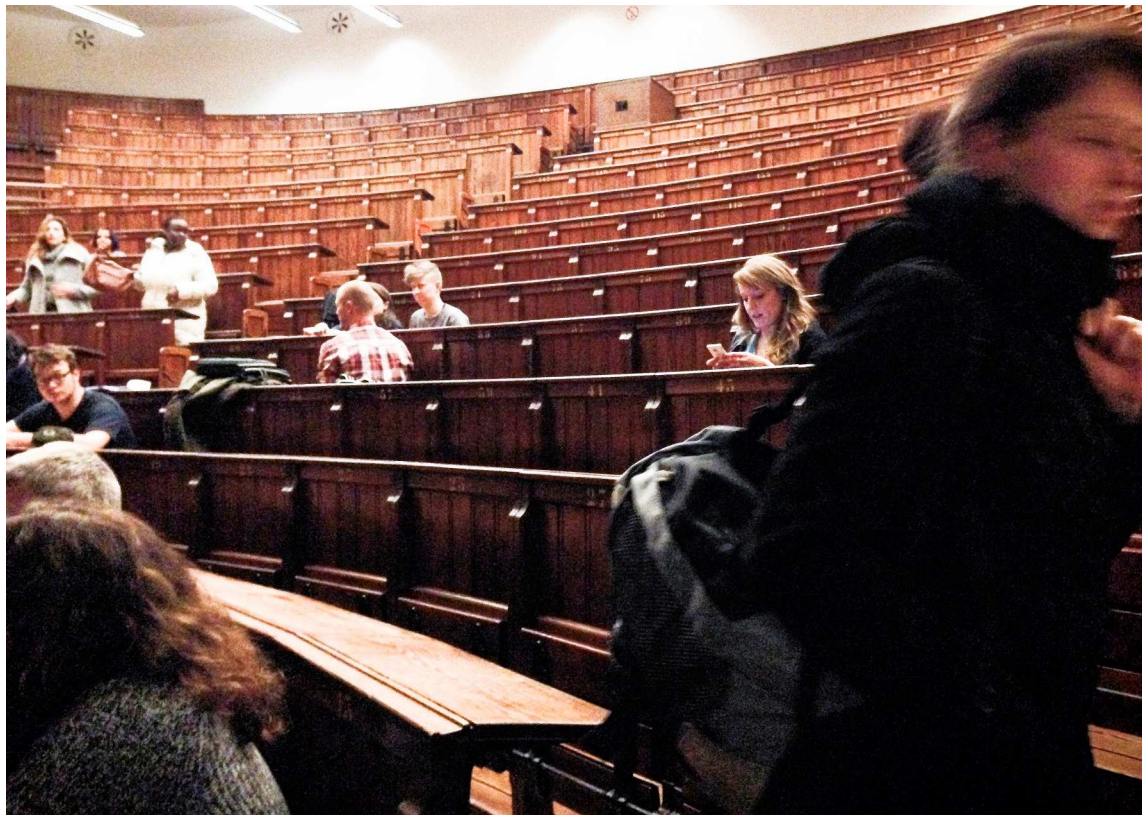
REFLECTIONS

I chose the above story first of all as just an opportunity to reflect on some emotions and tensions I recently had in my interactions as part of my research.

The tensions were indeed around my identity as a 'researcher' and as a 'woman' committed towards some political acts of friendship or interactions towards what the state defines as 'undocumented migrants'. I am currently trapped in my role as a 'border researcher' to write and conduct 'fieldwork' versus my role as a committed individual, woman, non-white, postcolonial migrant searching for ways to shift the colonial gaze of social scientific research within which I myself operate. Is it that because I myself am a migrant, I have 'more/less authority' in researching issues of migration? Also, because I am a researcher do I have a political commitment towards the topic of my so-called study or research? If so, what is it and how can I address it? Does my identity as a woman come in tension with my identity as an activist/researcher? And how can I simultaneously address these issues without separating them?



PHOTO BY
VICTORIA COFFEY



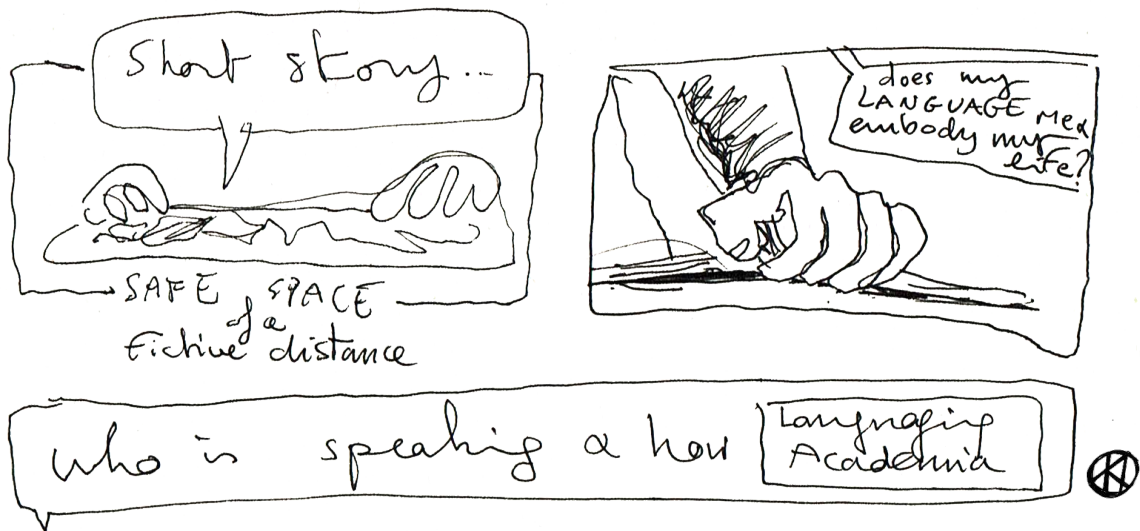
“
*Is it not
awkward that I
stand in front of
you here and
speak like I am
the 'expert'?*

R eflections on Awkwardness

A dialogue observing and rethinking academic conventions

//

An uneasy conversation provoked by uneasy encounters at the junction of
academic competence and individual identity.



AWKWARD.....IDENTITY.....Academic Awkwardness.....

Diary notes from a workshop

KOLAR APARNA

In the train on my way to Leuven from Maastricht. My mobile phone reminds me that I have crossed the border. No police checks yet. I check if I'm carrying my ID card, while working on my powerpoint presentation for the workshop.

Leuven central station ---> bus haltes-----> Bus no 2 to Heilig Hart clinique...>

session 1:

What is the authority of the researcher? what is "scientific"? Can we keep aside our subjective perception?

How does one incorporate the changing positionality of the researcher in relation to the transforming processes of knowledge production during research?

"But Identity is always changing!!", exclaims a lady from the audience. The same lady approaches me during the break and insists that I listen to a story on her experiences with some "Indian" men in the US that might answer my previous questions on the changing positionality of the researcher. I interrupt her here and ask her why I am the only person who needs to listen to this story and why not open this up to more people present in the workshop. She simply insists that I need to listen to the full story. Am shocked with her assertiveness and conviction but continue listening to her. She continues about how surprised she was when some "Indian" men she met in the US were disappointed with their wives they had married in India and who had now changed (in their value systems) after moving with them to the US. "Identity is always changing! so how could they complain about their wives changing?!" she screamed. I was still in shock of why she wanted to impose this story onto me in such an exclusive way rather than opening up the discussion. I repeat the question of why she felt the need to narrate this story only to me, but she walks away leaving me behind with a strong sense of **awkwardness**.

The presentations continue but my sense of **awkwardness** began to grow till it was my turn to speak..

Is identity something one can claim or is it claimed by others for you? Why does someone feel the need to lay claim on my identity?

Standing in front of you all I feel AWKWARD...awkward to stand in front of you..awkward in calling myself a 'researcher'...**awkward** in my position as a researcher...as a postcolonial migrant in a rather colonial frame that is the university - in adopting a way of looking and relating to the Other. It feels *awkward* to objectively 'Observe' someone and conduct 'objective' or 'participative' observation that distances and entangles me with the Other, the 'researcher' from the 'researched' in rather awkward ways.

I feel AWKWARD to call myself an 'expert'.

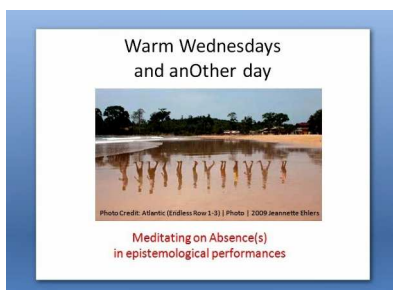
Is'nt it not AWKWARD that some researchers call themselves 'Africa' expert? Who is Africa? and What does it mean to be an 'Africa' expert? Why is academic identity appear so fixed?

I have a presentation prepared for this morning, but the feelings triggered by this small interaction a few minutes ago pushes me to delve into this feeling of 'awkwardness' into how we think, question and discuss and do 'academia and activism'...

is it not awkward that I stand in front of you here and speak like I am the 'expert'?

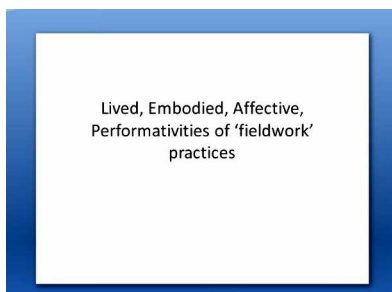
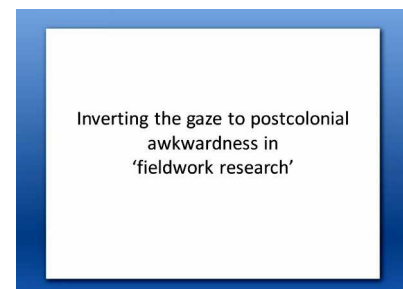
let's negotiate and co-produce this presentation...

Meditating on absence(s) in epistemological performances



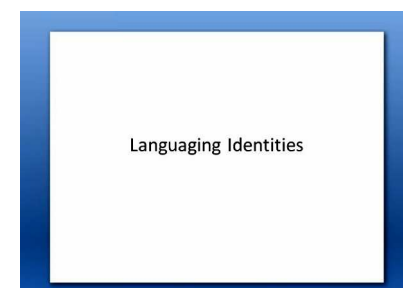
What do I mean by 'Meditating on Absence(s) in epistemological performances? In simple terms, can we be aware of or bring attention to what is 'Absent' in where and how we look at things and practice our way of being? Can we also look what is absent from the frame/ focus of one's research while simultaneously framing 'something'? What is Absent in this workshop on identity and academism? What is Absent in this room? what is Absent in this text that I write? what is Absent in what I say?

Why don't we take the 'awkwardness' of scientific endeavors more seriously rather than coming up with ways to 'cleanse' such feelings? Why not embracing this awkwardness to look to a new horizon? What about the awkwardness in activism? When one simultaneously struggles for change while being confronted with the complex and plural dimensions of human identities?



Why not building relations with each other that rather than being divisive in framing relations between the 'researcher'-'researched', activist-researcher? How about allowing for co-produced knowledges of lived embodied relations with each other?

Who am I and how many am I if I speak and think in more than one language? and who am I becoming if these languages are also slipping the frame?



The Awkward Award

Notes on a workshop and personal reflections

MARION WASSERBAUER

When Kolar starts her talk, the audience goes quiet... Participants check their programs: it promised a talk called “warm Wednesdays”, but now we are suddenly talking about awkwardness; did she just change her talk?

After about 7 minutes, which is around half of her designated speaking time, Kolar says something like: “I don’t know what to do now. Shall I just sit down?”

awkward silence

--- I loved that moment. Kolar succeeded in making all of us acutely and painstakingly aware of the artificiality and awkwardness of being *an academic* and at the same time *our very private and subjective self*---

“No, no – please go on! This is great!”, I answer her encouragingly.

I enjoy moments like these, when people reflect about their position in a certain context, and not only by reasoning, but by being emotionally touched, in this case, by being made feeling awkward through someone else talking about awkwardness.

As a young researcher/activist, I have experienced various awkward situations.

One strategy I have adopted in order to negotiate the awkwardness of stepping into an expert role, as academic activities imply, but not actually feeling like an expert or even more, not necessarily believing in the necessity and possibility of being “expert”, is to embrace the queer art of failure: I know that I do not know everything, I am aware of the faultiness and gaps in my academic activities and in my personal approach to things in life. *I am awkward.*

Yet, in activist context, I repeatedly realized that I cannot simply leave my knowledge and academic way of thinking behind. *I am aware* of so many things, my mode of thinking is forever influenced by reflexivity, theory and academia.

The good and the bad sex researcher?

The struggle over where to draw the line in academia and activism



“

I came to the realization that the key to my research was to embrace the dualities in my identity

This section is composed of stories about bringing sex and sexuality into academia. Janice Irvine's evening lecture is reflected in many ways. LGBT activism in China and speaking out about pedophilia are two specific and personal experiences that will be shared here.

This section also includes some illustrations of some other workshop participants.

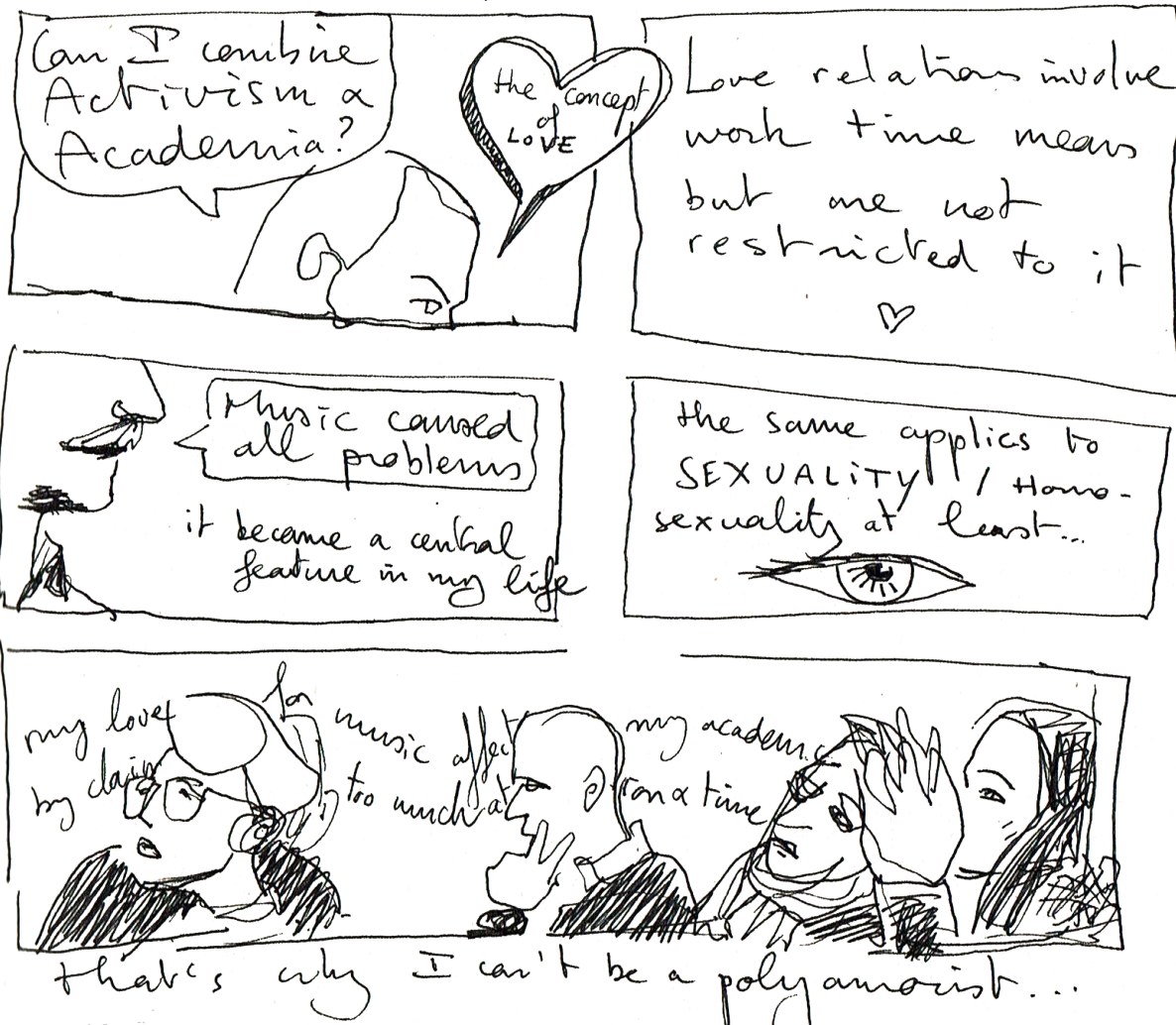
Talking about and researching sex and sexuality has many different faces, but we come to realize that the issues we are confronted with often lie at the intersection between the personal and the academic.



Framing Sex and Academia

Glimpses into talks of other participants of this section of the workshop.

Robbe



Tamir



Speaking on “pedophilia” and its consequences

GERT HEKMA

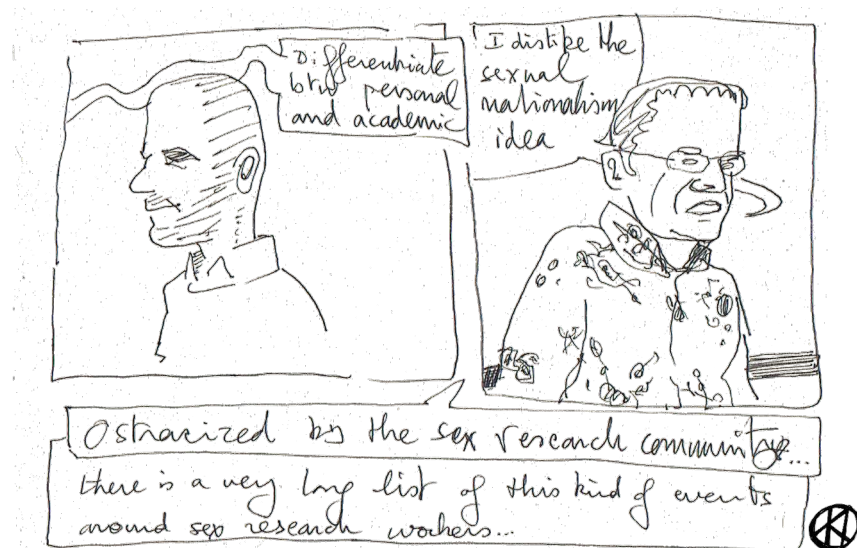


Scholars can run into problems from different sides. My questioning of pedophobia and witch hunts on pedophiles have created on several occasions serious problems for me from three different sides: the LGBT movement, governmental institutions and my direct colleagues. So it is not only extra-university bodies that create problems, but also the people you work with. This presentation is my personal rendering of the events.

The first occasion regarded the LGBT movement and the occasion was the 2007 Amsterdam Gay Canal Parade. Being part of the Parade Committee, I became a toy in a fight between two gay organisations that struggled for the right to organise this Parade. The one group denounced the other (that had City Hall's preference) for having me in their team. "My" team wanted to have a boat with 16 minus young queers, and was for that reason accused of promoting pedophilia. The other side abused a quote of mine in an old interview where I proposed to "force" kids to have sex at young ages, where the theme was about the use of force in education: with school, sleeping and eating habits and so on; so why not when it comes to sex? I now realise I should have better said push, or boost, and not force. I was presented as embodying the pedophile danger and as a "pedophile professor". This led to a flood of hate-mails and some death-threats, nervousness at the University and my withdrawal from the Gay Parade organisation. For 5 days, it created a small uproar in the media especially on internet. Happily, I received quite some support from the University, friends and people unknown to me. One student warned students against taking my courses and subsequently another embraced them. After this week of attacks I organised a "survival party" for friends and supporters.

Half a year later, I was interviewed in a major, one-time talk show "Bimbo's and Burqa's" on questions of multiculturalism in The Netherlands where the so-called halal sisters (Muslim journalists)

asked me, among other themes, whether a girl of 14 years could have sex with 1) another person; 2) a much older person, and 3) for money. I said yes on all questions, under the condition that the girl knew what she did and consented. The question is not the kind of sex, but abuse being made of the other – whether it is hetero-, homo-, pedo- or zoöphile. In my opinion, what youngsters need is sex education which is rarely given in a practical way in The Netherlands. Afterwards, a concerned citizen asked minister Plasterk of education (PvdA, “liberal” socio-democrat) whether a person like me should teach at the University. The minister answered: yes but (so a limit case). I read his letter to a hundred students in a lecture I was giving for a colleague as a warning for the students who, I have to say, loved the lecture after this “warning” (or warming up?). When I requested to participate some time later in a tender of the Ministry of Education for research proposals on “sexualisation”, the responsible person answered that I wasn’t the right person to pursue such research and could not participate in the tender; proposals I should do would not be considered.



Some years later the problem was with colleagues – and much worse in its consequences for me. In a conference on Sexual Nationalism organised by my direct colleagues and some former students, I was requested to participate in the final panel. I find the unreflected theories behind this concept not very convincing, and highly “politically correct” queer theory. The LGBT movement has struggled for inclusion in nation-states and now it is becoming reality, this inclusion is contested. I am in favour of this inclusion but prefer a continuing struggle for denormalisation and real inclusion because LGBTs remain second-class citizens, and also because other sexual minorities (sex workers, BDSM-ers, pedophiles) remain excluded from sexual citizenship rights while topics such as public sex and sexual education remain contested. Little freedom of expression in these cases. Sexual nationalism is also an abstract and not a concrete subject of research, and has gotten very repetitive. I said in the final panel something about my concerns and suggested practical research on the discussed questions of race, sexuality, gender and nation. I mentioned as examples global sex work and traditions

of intergenerational sex or pedophilia that exist in many parts of the world, like boy love in many Arab countries. It led to an uproar because linking Arab men to pedophilia didn't belong to the PC [ie, politically correct] way of thinking and a large part of the room led by the Queen of Queer Theory shouted me down. The room was already highly tense because of the way the conference was organised, and I became its butt. To my regrets, half of the people present didn't show any open-mindedness on the pedophile issue. My remarks led to many consequences for me. One of the conference organizers was my boss, and saw me as the person who had spoiled his party. I had to express my apologies, I had to defend myself against many complaints that were suddenly expressed on my subjective ways of teaching, and so on. I made my prudent apologies, and got a coach appointed that had to bring me back on the right track. Since, the relations became "normal" – but never for me – and I have moved to the margins of LGBT and sex research at my university as a "controversial" person.

What does this say on the topic of academia and activism? Quite simply, that academia itself is full of prejudices not very different from other institutions. It has become worse over the last decades. In the late nineties, I had a pedophile come to a class of mine which raised complaints directed towards University authorities. They told me that their answer to the complainant would be that pedophilia is indeed a controversial issue, and the University is the place where such difficult discussions should take place. Now, this topic has become unmentionable and such discussions close to unthinkable in universities all over the world. Transphobia, racism and the freedom of expression may nowadays be staples of Queer Theory but not pedophobia or the witch-hunt on child-love. The freedom of expression has apparently its limits.

I like the freedom of expression and the possibilities to experience sexual diversity beyond the alphabet soup of LGBTTTTIQQAA – including the old perversions, sex work or public sex. But also in a sexually so-called tolerant, liberal or free country like the Netherlands that praises itself for those qualities and believes it realized them, freedom of expression and sexual diversity are still far from realized. There is still a long way to go in society, sexual movements and academia.



QUEER COMRADES

A Visual Ethnographic Study of Activism in China's Contemporary LGBT Movement

STIJN DEKLERCK



This story relates to my doctoral research on activism in China's contemporary LGBT movement, with LGBT standing for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. The research journey leading to the completion of my doctoral research was marked by the intertwining of a variety of identities that didn't always live together in harmony. Throughout the process, I battled with combining my identities of researcher, activist, filmmaker, writer, lawyer, anthropologist and sinologist.

In a first part of this story, I give an overview of my doctoral research journey, and show how my different identities emerged. In the second part, I talk about the concept of "in-betweenness", a concept that became an overall leitmotif in my study.

RESEARCH JOURNEY

I started out my research more than 10 years ago after completing my law studies in Belgium. I went to China in 2000 with a definite "research" focus, developing a study looking at human rights conceptions in different areas of contemporary Chinese society. You can find one of my first articles on the subject matter [here](#).

To explore human rights conceptions within China's growing civil society, I veered to the discipline of legal anthropology, and developed an ethnographic study. I studied several Chinese grassroots-NGOs as a "participant observer". I wanted to let my research subjects, the NGOs, speak as much as possible for themselves. I let go of my human rights-related questions and focused my attention on hearing and recording what the NGOs and their constituents deemed important in their lives, with a plan to afterwards relate this to questions of human rights.

I increasingly engaged myself in these organizations, helping out with their activities. In this process, I gradually lost sight of my research-focus. I felt increasingly disaffected with academia. I questioned the use of abstract thinking on human rights

conceptions in China when the NGOs I was working with faced very real and immediate issues. I felt I could be of more use by concretely helping out. I started to identify more as an activist than as a researcher - I was no longer a "participant observer" in the organizations, who focuses on the observation while participating, but became an "observing participant", who focuses on the participation and observes at the same time.

I took a particular interest in Chinese NGOs working on HIV/AIDS and on LGBT-issues, and I worked as an activist in the field. One project that I initiated within an HIV/AIDS organization had a particular effect on me. In 2005, I produced the film "Living Positive", an educational docu-drama for which I closely worked together with people living with HIV/AIDS. To work with film was an eye-opening experience for me. I found that film offers a different and more directly engaging way to let people "speak for themselves". It offers a visual directness expressing nuances hard to transmit through writing. I also felt an enhanced collaboration with my research subjects, who became direct and immediate partners in a project to bring out their story. The experience unlocked my love for



filmmaking.

My combined passion for film and activism culminated in me co-founding [Queer Comrades](#), China's first ever LGBT webcast, in 2007. I first worked as a volunteer, and in 2009 I took up the job of full-time producer. Queer Comrades is a non-profit, non-governmental Chinese webcast. We produce videos on important developments and issues in the Chinese and global LGBT movement and broadcast them online. Our mission is to document LGBT culture in all its aspects in order to raise public awareness on LGBT matters in China. By now, we have amassed more than 20 million video views and more than 20 million website hits.

After years of working in the LGBT-movement in China, I felt the need in 2012 to engage in reflection on what my organization and other activists had achieved. I wanted to reflect on overall LGBT activist tendencies in China, and get a more informed view on future activist directions. This reflection had gotten lost throughout my years of activist work. I decided to return to academia, and to finish the research project I had started so many years ago.

When going back to academia, I felt apprehensive about the fact that I now came in as an "activist" rather than a "researcher". My writing was coloured by my years within the movement, and was filled with activist instead of academic jargon. My reflexes were also the reflexes of an activist promoting diversity and understanding of LGBT-issues in China, and not of an academic attempting a "neutral" or "objective" description and analysis of LGBT-activism in China. Furthermore, I felt more "filmmaker" than "writer", and felt apprehensive about entering a world where writing is still the number one mode of expression.

When I started work on my dissertation, I came to the realization that the key to my research was to embrace the dualities in my identity. Instead of

trying to be an academic in academia and an activist within the LGBT-organizations I form part of, I chose to term my research "activist research". In the same vein, I developed my dissertation as a combination of Queer Comrades videos and a written study.

The videos, which I made together in dialogue with my Chinese team members on the webcast, give an intricate overview of the variety of activist actors and actions that make up the Chinese LGBT movement, and provide a platform visually transmitting central ideas dominating LGBT activism. Key thesis videos are very varied in content, and include documentaries capturing reactions of the authorities against LGBT organizing ("[Comrades, you've worked hard!](#)"); documentaries featuring prominent LGBT activists talking about the origins and the future of the movement in China ("[The Cream of the Queer Crop](#)"); talk shows dealing with the centrality of the family in the lives of



Chinese LGBT People ("[Family Matters](#)"); documentaries addressing social ignorance and instances of discrimination against LGBT people ("[Cures that Kill](#)", "[Strong](#)"); and documentaries highlighting communities at the margins of the current LGBT movement in China ("[Brothers](#)"). The written study offers a framework enabling a structured and informed viewing of the Queer Comrades videos.

I furthermore made use of methodologies and theories found in a variety of disciplines I encountered throughout my research, including law, anthropology, sociology, political science and gender and queer studies. My study found its ultimate home in Sinology, a field of study that is not weighed down by its own set methodology, but favours a dance between various disciplines and methodologies.

IN-BETWEENNESS

This brings me to the second part of my story, in which I discuss the concept of "in-betweenness". "In-betweenness" became a leitmotif within my study, a leitmotif I began to take increasingly seriously. Situated in-between activism and research, in-between visuals and written text, and in-between academic disciplines, the "in-betweenness" also organically seeped into my research on LGBT activists and activism, which I situate in-between out and in the closet, in-between visibility and invisibility, in-between tolerated and forbidden, etc. In a recent article, Professor Nicolas Standaert indicates that this "in-betweenness" can be termed a distinct mode of intellectual inquiry, and highlights it as a dominant feature of Sinology. He points to three dimensions of "in-betweenness". In the following, I elaborate briefly on these dimensions, and relate them to my study.

First of all, it is a question of existential identity. I embrace the fact that I am a "sojourner of the between", a between-being, an intermediate, between "outsider" and "insider" of the Chinese LGBT movement, between "activist" and "researcher". This is a position causing simultaneous feelings of being both at home and in exile. "Being between" is hereby not just something external. It affects identity, and calls for an embracing of characteristics of in-betweenness including ambiguity, ambivalence, indetermination, tension, complexity.

A second dimension of "in-betweenness" lies in a mode of thinking. It is thinking with, against and across categories, worrying the lines between categories. The main challenge becomes speaking the word(s) of the between - wording the between. I do this by inquiring into the lines between different disciplines, and in combining visuals with written text. Moreover, I do this in my study of LGBT activism by worrying the in-between of out and in the closet, visibility and invisibility, the tolerated and the forbidden, and by attempting to "word the between" through concepts such as "strategic outness", "strategic visibility", the "grey zone" between what is tolerated and forbidden, etc. Worrying the lines between categories hereby involves choosing permanent reflection and questioning over great theories. It implies a permanent suspension of certainty, which in itself is a contribution to knowledge. This suspension of certainty gives a space to elements of creativity and imagination, which can bring forth new meanings and understandings.

"In-betweenness" is also a matter of attention. It is attention to interval, gap, in-between moment or zone in culture and human life. In my study, it comes to the fore throughout the study of interpersonal relationships. Instead of focusing on binary

oppositions, on either/or, on Self or Other, the focus moves to the "between", to the search for the interaction between opposites, to various forms of encounter and conversation. As such, rather than sticking to binaries of "researcher" and "research subjects", my study adopts "activist research" to highlight what is dialogically produced in the "between". At the same time, attention to the between is also attention to the margins. In order to let a new light shine through the gates of dominant interpretations, one focuses on marginal thinkers, marginal figures or marginal groups instead of on the mainstream. In my case, my activism and study in the LGBT community sheds light not only on LGBT sides of China, but also and most importantly on the dominant structures and norms in China.

Embracing "in-betweenness" and taking it seriously thus became the key for me to unlock my positioning and inquiries within the academic and activist world. It also showed me how I can contribute to an academic field often still stuck on binaries and black and white thinking. I hope it can also provide some inspiration to you.



SOURCES

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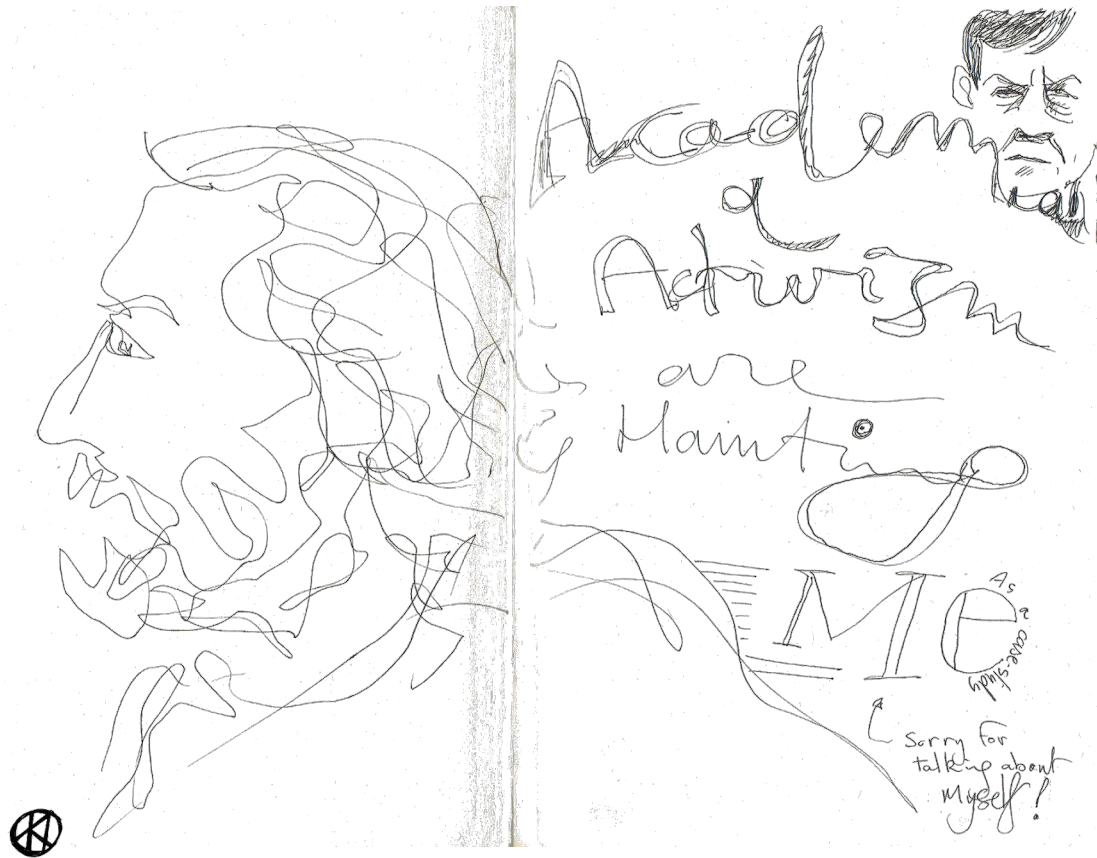
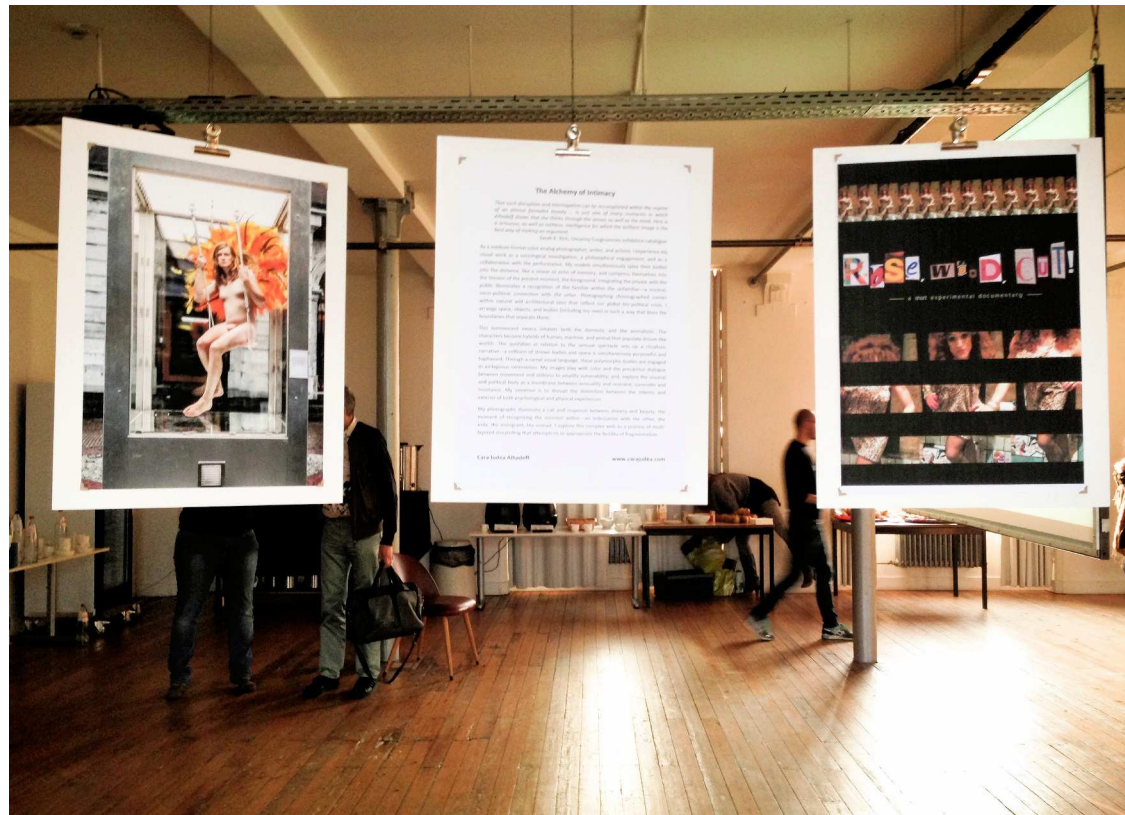


PHOTO BY NAOMI BEELDENS:
Portraying the artist Maarten Loopmans

PHOTO BY
VICTORIA COFFEY

“ Yes, you are very strong academically but we, artists, have this saying that art should stand on its own.



Queer Arts as Activism

Several of the contributions that reached us proposed artworks on the topics of gender and sexuality as a form of activism. We decided to create a small exhibition and screening of these artworks. The posters and accompanying texts of two persons merging the personal with the artistic and academic fields are included in the following pages.

Dealing with working in unknown fields and rejection by the 'experts' in these fields is reflected in one contribution, while the other interacts with the public, provoking uneasy questions by disrupting the binary structured heteronormative society.



Day 6

Ceci n'est pas la nature*

In Western civilization logical thinking is based on the division man/woman; as stated by Freud, the first thing we take note of in every new encounter, is whether we are dealing with a man or a woman. When the recognition is not automatic, this leads to insecurity, annoyance or happy excitement.

On April 9 this year, the Netherlands accepted the transgender law. Since then, in order to change one's gender at the Register Office, it is sufficient to be convinced that one belongs to the other sex; nowhere else in the world can you have "female" written in your passport while having a penis. (Australia however offers another option: neutral.)

Over the past few years there has been an increased incomprehension towards people with deviant gender identities, especially from the religious corner. Also, it is not easy for these people to find a job, if not in entertainment.

*This is not nature



Selm Wenselaers in *Ceci n'est pas... la nature*.

A performance by Dries Verhoeven. © Willem Popelier & Jens Dreske.

More: www.driesverhoeven.com



Rose, World, Cut!

— a short experimental documentary —





Rose, Wood, Cut!: When an academic makes a film

‘Some people are looking at me like: Wow! What is that? What’s that thing? Ha?’ That thing is Rose Wood, a trans-aggressive performer. S_he is preparing for two short performances this night. We are in the backstage: ‘Maybe you could film me here? I’d love to watch myself getting ready!’ But Rose, I’m an academic! I don’t know how to film! Still, I pull out my smart phone and start filming. I document how, in a tiny bar room in Manhattan, Rose is transforming s_herself into a homeless person. And then into a club queen. S_he is a club queen! Is it still a documentary? A documentary on what? Rose Wood? The club queen? Or my own penetrating gaze...? Cut! Cut! Cut! ‘We are very sorry to inform you that we are not able to include your film in this year’s program of our festival. We have received many engaging films from transgender filmmakers and prefer transgender people to speak for themselves’. But that is Rose Wood, s_he is speaking! Though, not for transgender people, I guess... Possibly for the homeless person. Or the club queen. Most likely for s_herself! And I speak for myself! My cuts are the roses I smell and the woods I gather! ‘Yes, you are very strong academically but we, artists, have this saying that art should stand on its own.’ Doesn’t *Rose, Wood, Cut!* stand on its own? Who should stand back? Cut!

Opening Lecture: Ico Maly

Some impressions by Marion Wasserbauer



“

As an intellectual you are not trying to make yourself popular or expecting applause, you are entering in public to be critical.



Ico works at the University of Tilburg. For five years he was the coordinator of Kif Kif and organized a mediawatch of discourse about minorities in Belgium, aiming to contribute to the interculturalisation and democratization of media. Ico spoke about the artificial split between the "academic researcher" and the "intellectual activist". What about those academics combining their research with political commitment? Based on his own experiences, as well as examples from recent Belgian history, he explored how academia and activism can work for and against each other.

Ico Maly gave a passionate talk about public intellectuals: what are they, what are their duties and what does it feel like to be one? Maarten Loopmans' drawings capture the emotional argumentation of this very personal morning lecture. Symbols of peace and socialism in the drawing reflect Maly's position.

What characterizes the *public intellectual*?

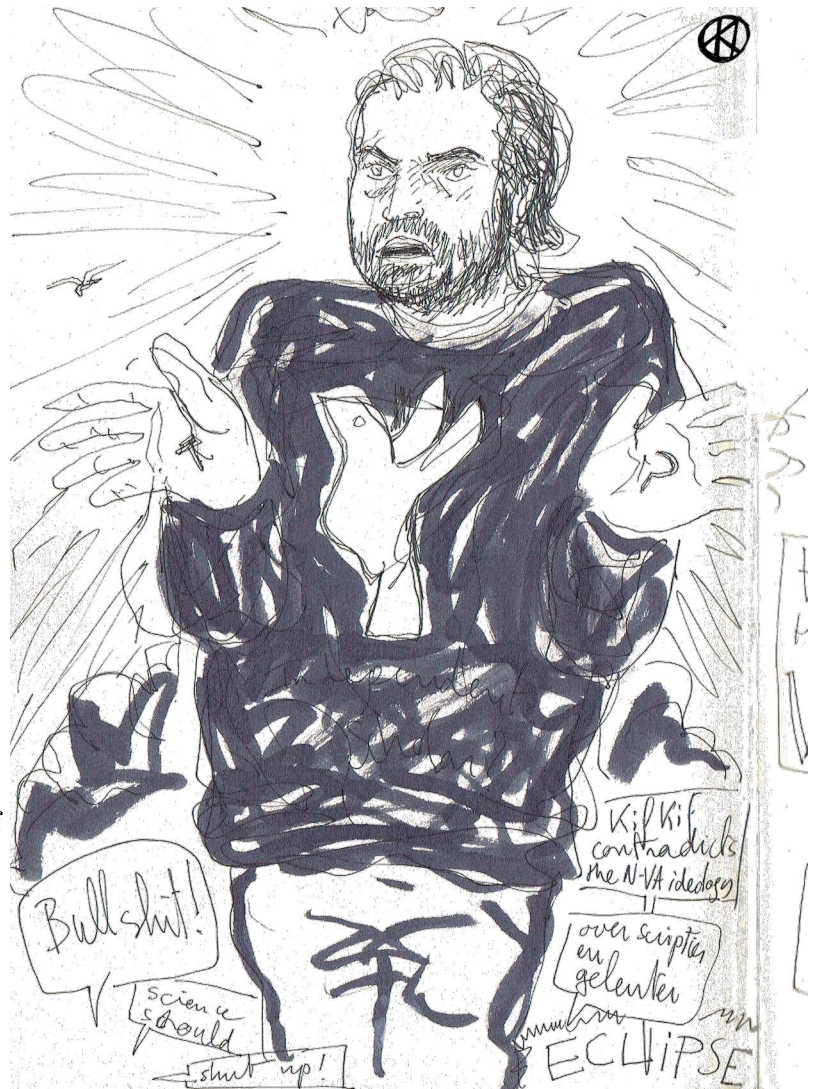
- makes public discursive interventions grounded in critical research
- shows societal and political commitment
- functions on the principles of equality, freedom, human rights
- is criticized as: ideologue, traitor, unpatriotic intellectual
- is a marginal figure or an exile
- has got a responsibility to speak up

What does *public* mean here?

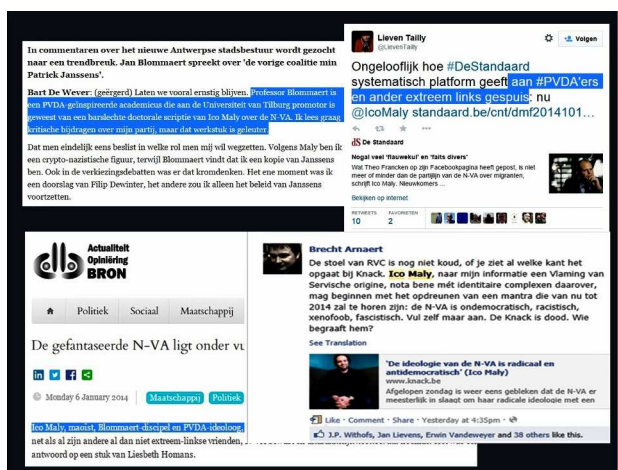
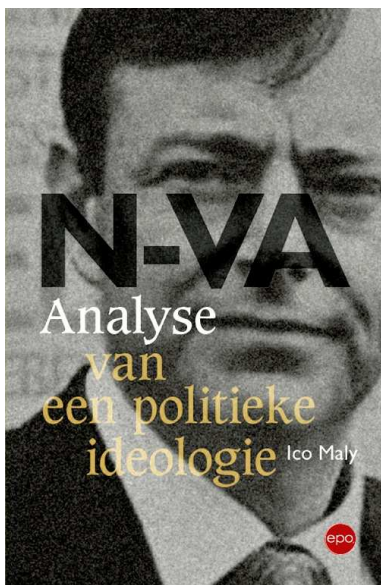
- speaking in mass media
- but also teaching, having a blog,...
- science itself

Where does *hegemony* come in?

- social or cultural dominance of certain groups in society
- fields of hegemonic production of power: politics, media, science



“ Being an intellectual is to be counter-hegemonic (Said, 1994), to question the normality of the day in order to improve society.



The consequences of going public: a case

Ico Maly experienced the consequences of going public as an intellectual first-hand, when his PhD-dissertation was published as a book, got picked up by the media and thus became available to the broader public. He analysed the discourse and political ideology of the Flemish right-wing party N-VA (New Flemish Alliance). The reactions by right-wing politicians were very harsh and tended to attack Maly personally. His roots, his work for the intercultural organization KifKif and the mediawatch he set up, reporting racist media coverage, and his supervisor Jan Blommaert, an intellectual with socialist affiliations, certainly fuelled the negative discourse around his book. The work of the academic Maly became intertwined with his personal life and activist anti-racist engagement. As the (social) media examples of reactions on the book shows, he was called a “PVDA-ideologue” (the Flemish Marxist Worker’s party of Belgium), “extreme leftist grabble” and N-VA party leader De Wever called his work “miserable”. “Nationalism is emotional”, Maly states during his lecture, and this is one explanation to why the reactions to his book were so harsh and attacked not only his work, but him personally. Yet, the main reason for this personal attack is that it allows for those adversaries of the work (such as N-VA politicians) not to engage with the content of the work, as this would give legitimacy to the work. Indeed, when the academic enters the political field, a battle on ‘the truth’ –in this case, the meaning of the political project of N-VA- is at stake. Many of the criticisms were therefore not targeting the content, but were discrediting the author personally. Maly’s personal life and activism was now used as a discrediting attribute, a way of fundamentally not engaging

with the arguments in the work and downplaying the work as 'subjective' and 'not scientific'.

As Maly states, "the academic regime of truth states that mixing politics with science is regarded as 'ideological' and 'thus' as the end of science" (Maly 2015). This separation of society, politics and science, however, "leads to one sided science at its best; bad science at its worst" (Maly 2015). One of Maly's critics points exactly to this dispute in the tradition of academic research:

"The biggest problem of this book is found in the subjectivity. The credibility of an analysis of a political ideology stands or falls with the independence of the author". (right-wing activist, cited in Maly 2015 b)

For Maly, the transition from academia to working in civil society and returning to academia for a PhD, felt very natural (Maly, 2015). However, his case shows, that this mingling may not be unproblematic. The questions we are to deal with when academia, activism and identity intersect, are:

If we have got the knowledge, do we have the duty to invest in civil society?

What are the consequences of going public, and what are the benefits?

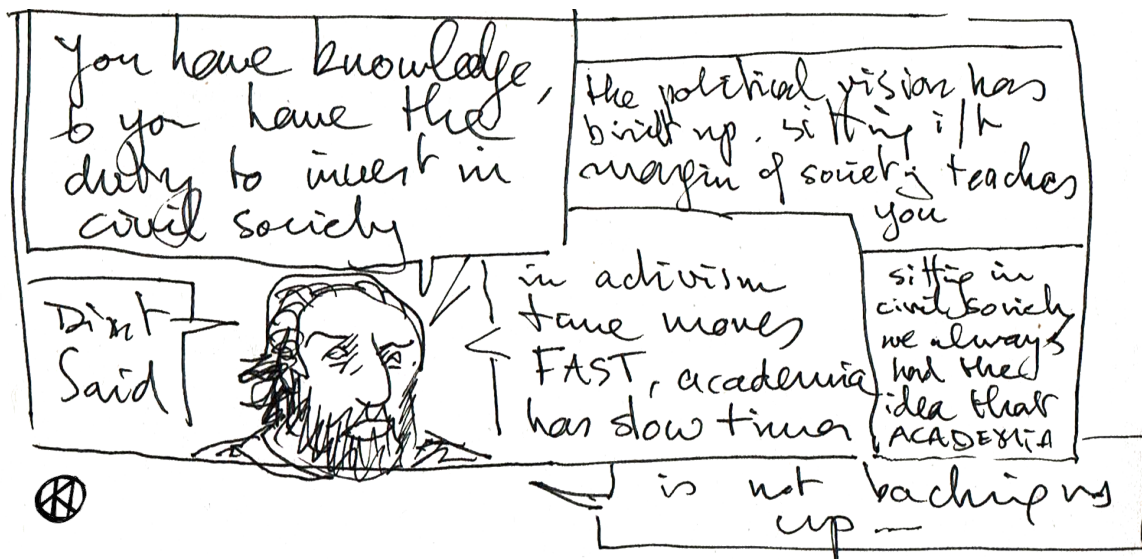


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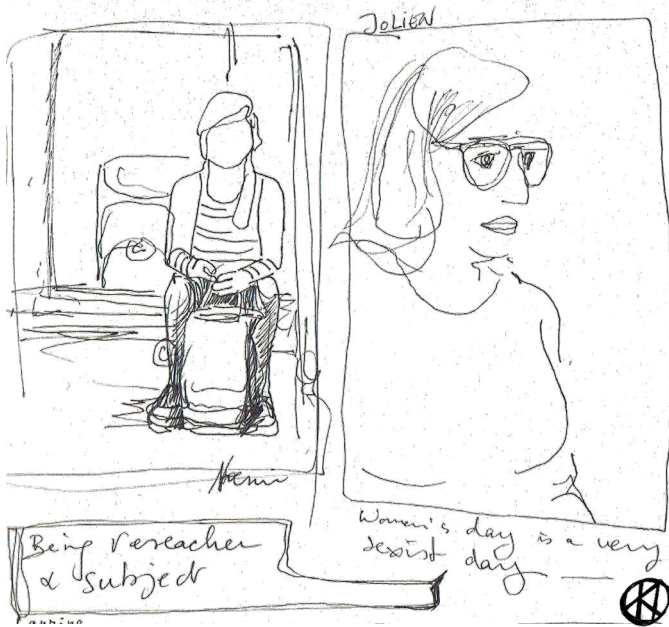
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Academia and activism – (re)working privilege?



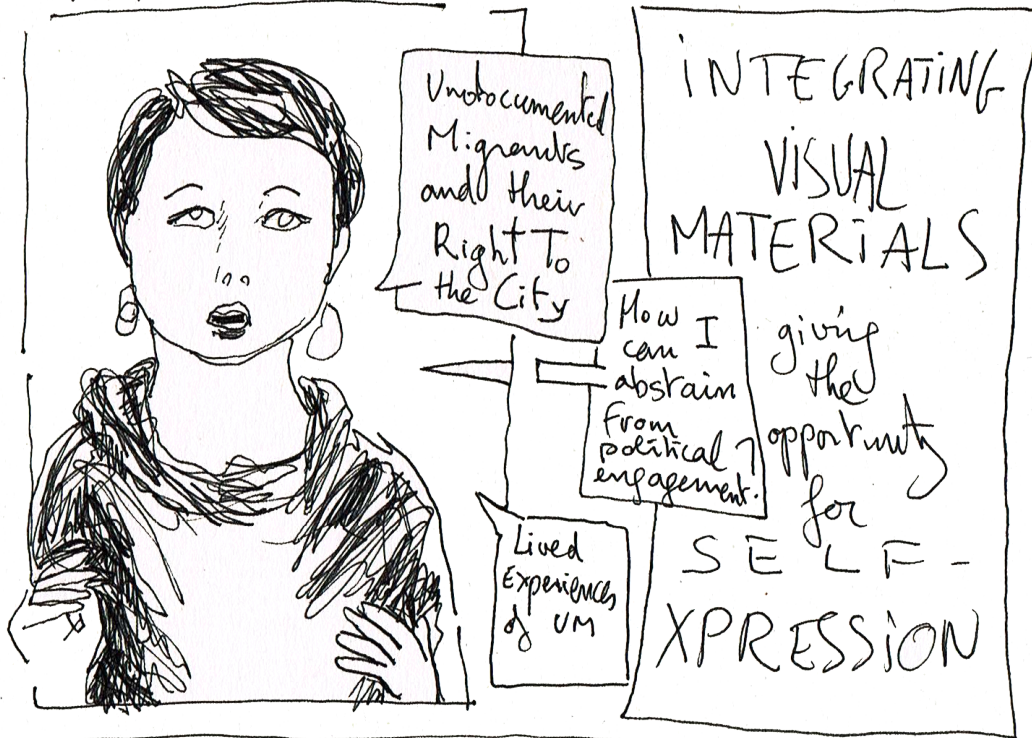
“ That is
where power
can be used
and
redistributed

Being researcher and researched subject at the same time can be tricky; however, standing outside of the researched group may cause trouble as well. Caught between ethical considerations and a hands-on attitude, research projects may become difficult to navigate.

Two participants share their "mixed feelings" - stories, granting us insight into their research practice and personal lives.



Afra



Allows us to step out of academia...

... but are also disregarded as Academic or political output
- except for Forensic Architecture

is it the visual
or the
expressive?



“All those images of *boat refugees*!”: ethical conflict and moral anxiety in visual ethnographic fieldwork with irregular migrants in Athens

AFRA DEKIE



When the subway stopped at its final station, a sense of uncomfortable nervousness overwhelmed me. I was at Piraeus, the port of Athens. The weight of my film camera, carried inside a most ordinary bag and pressing against my hip, was just another irrefutable reminder of the purpose of me being there. For many days I had been indecisive whether I would come to Piraeus to film hundreds of “boat refugees” arriving from the Greek islands after having crossed the sea from Turkey.

I was in Athens only for a short three weeks, attending a summer school on visual ethnography as a visiting scholar, yet I wanted to engage in some exploratory visual fieldwork in the frame of my research project on irregular migrants’ lived experiences of the everyday city (their experiences of (in)visible urban exclusion, as well as their practices of place-making, urban protest and spatial claims for urban citizenship). As an anthropologist, seeking to explore people’s subjective experiences of urban space and place, I consider profound ethnographic fieldwork as essential to my research project.

Setting up any fieldwork activities, however, had been an unattainable endeavour so far, since I had embarked on my project as an “independent researcher” just months ago, after two years of unsuccessfully attempting to obtain funding and institutional support. It was thus with ecstatic excitement that I set out for some research in Athens. Restricted in time, my “ethnographic adventure”, however, quickly turned out to be of a rather hasty and undefined nature. With only a short three weeks to rush through the city to study multiple urban geographies of irregular migration through visual observation, ‘walking with video’, and a small number of no more than 15 in-depth interviews (with irregular migrants and some expert informants working at NGO’s), this was indeed nothing but an initial exploration of the field and far from an in-depth ethnographic account. In fact, such run-and-gun styled visual inquiry seemed to be all the more counterproductive to the primary objective of ethnographic fieldwork, i.e. to enhance understanding of human (inter)subjectivity through long-term participant observation, personal commitment and engagement. Indeed, it is the “ethnographic encounter” with the “other” which opens up the possibility to create an intimate space for human recognition and understanding between the ethnographer and his/her informants, and which became strongly jeopardized in this context. Such a methodological obstacle, or rather shortcoming (the absence of long-term fieldwork), strongly undermined the validity and legitimacy of my research “findings” (which did not bother me as such as I had no intentions nor expectations to disseminate any of the findings, aside from editing the visual data into a short exploratory documentary film), but this also reinforces particularly complicated ethical and moral issues already inherent to research on irregular migration. It seemed, these issues of ethics and morality, such as my positioning as a researcher, my relation towards my informants, and my “right” to represent their experiences and stories, became even more pertinent and critical in the absence of long-term fieldwork. Yet, these issues were also challenged by the use of visual methodologies or the presence of my film camera in the field, and the political context of the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015 during which this research took place. Following the heightened politicization and mediatization of irregular migration and the intensification of anti-immigration discourses and policies in 2015, representing irregular migrants became a highly sensitive and political matter, not to be ignored by researchers involved in the study of displacement and immobility. Hence, although my “fieldwork adventure” was so short in time and limited in scope, it nonetheless strongly emphasized the significance of various ethical and moral questions, or challenges and difficulties, to (visual) research on irregular migration, which have so far been scarcely addressed in academic debate. This article offers a short autoethnographic account of the many challenges, doubts, and instances of ethical and moral conflict and anxiety I encountered during this visual fieldwork.



When I arrived at the station of Piraeus, it was just another smothering afternoon. The small station, with no more than two tracks leading to the centre of Athens, had a charming architecture with images of the port nicely painted on its walls. As such the station stood in stark contrast with the food shops outside, crowded with hungry holidaymakers on their way to one of Greece's many islands for some soothing relaxation on its beaches. I followed these tourists and easily found my way to the gates of the ferries. Since I had not verified the ferries' schedules online (time tables and itineraries), but had decided impromptu to come to Piraeus just an hour ago, I was not certain if there would be any chances to catch sight of ferries arriving from Lesbos, Chios or Kos, the Greek islands in closest vicinity to Turkey. In the previous days, there had been a high increase of people, coming mostly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, arriving on these islands. After registering with the immigration authorities, and obtaining a temporary permit to stay in the country, these persons embark on ferries to Athens to continue, in most cases, their journey northwards. Athens, for most of them, serves just as a transit space or a connecting node within migration routes towards Northern and Western European countries, due to Greece's poor facilities and infrastructures for asylum seekers, the inadequacy of the authorities' processing of asylum applications and the lack of economic opportunities following the country's state of crisis. As I crossed the road to gate E7, just at the entrance of the port, I could see a huge ship coming in, ready to dock. I rushed through the entrance and pulled out my camera. Setting the manual settings of my camera just took a little more time than usual as my hands were slightly shivering. I felt uncomfortable. I had been indecisive indeed for many days whether I would come to Pireaus to film the arrival of "boat refugees". For reasons of political, moral, ethical, methodological, and emotional kind (I will address each of these in this article), I doubted the utility of having to shoot such images. From a political stance, first of all, I was very concerned about the (visual) representation of irregular

migration into Europe as a phenomenon of “mass arrival”. Images of hundreds of “boat refugees” arriving on the shores of Europe or walking along train tracks in Macedonia and Serbia, have been prominent in media representations of the “refugee crisis” of 2015. Although such photographs and videos are “authentic”, and point out the emergency of the humanitarian crisis, such abstract and depersonalized images equally risk to generate largely decontextualized and dehistoricized accounts of forced displacement, neglecting the causes of the phenomenon altogether.



In addition, in many instances, images of “mass arrival” had increasingly been used, or rather abused, in mediatized and politicized anti-immigration campaigns and policies, instigating fear and hatred, not just through visual images of “mass arrival” but also through discourses of anti-immigrant sentiment (and the use of criminalizing labels such as “illegal” migrants), e.g. the “invasion of illegal migrants”, a “swarm of people coming into Europe” etcetera. In this way, these (visual) representations and discourses of “mass arrival” have been intensifying the “othering” of irregular migrants and asylum seekers as “illegals”, “non-citizens”, “non-belonging”, and even “non-existent”. Consequently, any representation of (the arrival of) asylum seekers and irregular migrants, in this context of the “refugee crisis” of 2015, inevitably formed a strong political representation and assertion. I thus felt somehow skeptical and reluctant to film the arrival of “boat refugees” in Piraeus. In fact, I did not know how to “handle” filming these images, keeping in mind the objective of my research project to focus on and reveal people’s individual subjective experiences of border regimes and immobility as opposed to representations of “mass arrival”. Likewise, I was doubtful and concerned when seeking to use my camera as a research tool to explore urban spaces and places of irregular migration in the centre of Athens. I pondered on how to represent in meaningful ways urban spaces such as parks, stations and squares, now functioning as sleeping grounds and living spaces for irregular migrants, and thus indeed forming actual sites of “mass arrival”.

In which ways could images of these spaces add to audiences' understanding of and engagement with irregular migrants' experiences, for whom the material aspects of these spaces are indeed so tangible and critical to their everyday lives? This time, I feared to slip into a trap of conceiving conventional representations of "refugeeness" equated with "suffering", "bare life", stripping yet again all individuality, identity, and agency from those in front of my camera, and risking as such to reinforce their and other irregular migrants' and asylum seekers' invisibility and voicelessness. Hence, at times, I opted to film urban spaces in all emptiness. Omonia Square e.g. was abandoned during day-time, when temperatures rose up to almost 40 degrees, but during the evening and night, the square would fill up with mostly Syrian asylum seekers. I focused on the mere material and sensorial aspects of these urban spaces, which, as mentioned, are so significant in the lives of irregular migrants, when public spaces become actual living spaces for them. When editing the material later on, I hoped I would be able to utilize and integrate various different layers of image, sound, text, observation, and interview in the process of reconstructing narratives. Hence, by seeking different visual languages and forms of narration to represent these spaces of "mass arrival", instead of reproducing them directly on screen, I sought to overcome the pitfalls of representing irregular migrants in abstract and depersonalizing (harmful) ways, or as images of difference and alterity. In addition to these pitfalls of harmful representations of "mass arrival" and "refugeeness", there is also an intrinsic tension between visualizing and "making visible" irregular migrants in visual research on irregular migration. Taking place in violation of the law, irregular migration is considered an "illegal" practice and therefore forms, by its nature, a largely covert phenomenon. This not only makes it difficult to gain access to the field (research may easily appear to be interrogative and as such may form an obstacle to gaining trust), but particularly generates significant consequences for the visualization of irregular migrants and the dissemination of their practices. The disclosure of personal information (through direct visual representations of individuals) regarding individuals' identity, whereabouts, migration stories and journeys may have a significant impact on their im/mobilities. Uncovering the age, legal status, country of entrance, and story of migration of a person may strongly unfavor his or her application for asylum or any other form of authorized stay. But also the dissemination of information, on a group level, of irregular migrants' routes, strategies, and networks of mobility may be used (or abused) by enforcement agencies to manage border regimes, enhance surveillance and control mobility. Regardless the researchers' political and moral stance towards the enforcement of border regimes, irregular migration research ought not to harm or endanger, nor have an impact on the practices of mobility of irregular migrants, who already find themselves in a highly vulnerable and disenfranchised position. Hence, it is an ethical and moral responsibility and obligation for the researcher to refrain from disseminating information which may potentially be abused by enforcement agencies. As such, there is a strong tension, particularly in my own research, between the obligation to visualize irregular migrants and their practices in anonymous or unidentifiable ways (as to protect them), whilst simultaneously seeking to "make visible" their invisibility or experiences of immobility and exclusion, by giving voice also agency and individuality.

What is needed then, are forms of visual languages (and perhaps also methods), wherein authority and authenticity do not derive from the representation of a person's face or voice in recognizable and direct ways. Participatory methods and the use of subject-generated content may offer opportunities here for self-representation and self-narration by focusing on individuals' experiences (for practical reasons I had no options to integrate participatory methods in my fieldwork in Athens, yet I intend to do so in future fieldwork), and as such these methods can also be emancipatory when allowing participants to re-narrate their own stories, and in this way gain power over the ways their own stories are represented to the world. In Athens, however, I did film people's faces at times, when interviewing them, and after assuring it was "safe" to film them (the outcomes of revealing persons' identities and stories, however, can never be entirely predicted as immigration policies and regulations continually change. I wish to stress here also that a sound knowledge and understanding of immigration law and policy is necessary when conducting research on irregular migration). So when interviews allowed me to "screen" people's stories, as well as to obtain consent, this is not possible when filming outside, on public urban spaces. In such contexts, making oneself and the presence of the camera visible, is usually regarded as sufficient ethical standard of consent in visual ethnographic research (when not met with objection by those being filmed), yet this is clearly problematic when filming irregular migrants. As such, I found it an arduous task to meaningfully visually explore and film Athens' urban geographies of irregular migration and people's experiences of these spaces and places. Restrained by issues over political representation in the context of the "refugee crisis" of 2015 and the consequences of revealing "illegal" practices, I felt exceedingly reluctant to make use of my camera in the field. So when I stood there in Piraeus, watching the ferry docking and all its passengers disembarking, I felt both disappointed and relieved when discovering the ship had been packed with tourists only. I carried on filming nonetheless, and when reviewing those images of ostensibly happy holidaymakers, tugging their oversized suitcases and hastening away, the stark contrast with images of arriving "boat refugees" (filmed just a few days later) formed a pronounced expression of the politics of im/mobility.



“After all, anthropology is the study of what makes us human.”

Four days later I returned to Piraeus, accompanied this time by a kind fellow participant of the summer school. A ferry from Chios arrived around 8am and now there were numerous asylum seekers with only a handful of tourists blending in. People, coming mainly from Syria and Afghanistan, stood gathered in small groups in front of the ferry. I started filming with hesitation, positioned at some distance. In previous days, I had often reflected on and anticipated filming this space. How could I read and capture this space? How could I represent in visual ways what this space means as a place of arrival and departure, as a significant connecting node within transnational and even global routes of irregular migration? How could I uncover discourses of national and European citizenship, border regimes and regimes of immobility, visually embedded in this space? So I stood there, and I observed and filmed: people arriving and cheerfully taking selfies, after positioning themselves in front of a ship with the inscription “Holland America Line”; telecom vendors rushing around eager to sell SIM cards to these newcomers (while also being the only ones to provide information to irregular migrants about how to reach the city centre); a greatly oversized billboard reading “Piraeus Cultural Coast. The port welcomes the citizens” (which citizens?); white stripes of seasalt on people’s rucksacks marking the rough inhuman journey they had gone through (some had lost their bags at sea, yet many were carrying small canvas tents); the air of excitement and relief combined with the sight of fatigue and stress on people’s faces after a lengthy and dangerous journey (there is no safe way in crossing the Mediterranean Sea). These just formed few of the many visual indicators pointing out the importance of this space within geographies of (transit) migration in Athens, Greece, and even Europe. Its functioning as a point of arrival and departure; geographically as a central and connecting node within routes of migration, but also symbolical as people’s entrance into the (“safe”) space of Europe (expressed by people’s clear sense of relief upon arrival and their instant calling and messaging to those left at “home”); hence the space thus also taking on a symbolic meaning as a place of hope for a better future.



The sight of people's cheerfulness and alleviation after disembarking moved me as I shared their feelings of relief for arriving safe and sound after crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Yet, it also bestowed on me an odd sense of bitterness and concern, for I knew what lay ahead of these people was yet a long and equally hazardous journey.



In the previous days, various people had recounted me in interviews their stories of attempting to cross the border between Greece and Macedonia; young, strong men who had tried up to three times to cross the border and move northwards, but who were obliged to return because they had been injured, too tired of hiking through the mountains, and had been lacking food and equipment. Ibrahim, a two-year old Syrian boy we joined, with his father and a few other Syrians, from Piraeus to the city centre of Athens, would also need to undertake this journey in a few days' time. Perhaps two days later, when I took a flight from Athens to Vienna, he would be travelling the same route over land, through the mountains, facing and fearing border control, detention, and starvation. I never heard of Ibrahim again. Fearing to appear intrusive, I did not dare to ask his father for his telephone number, or any of the other men who recounted us stories and showed us pictures of their journeys from and lives in Syria, while we traveled together on the subway to Athens and to Omonia Square (their first moments in Europe). It did not occur to me to give them my number (even when I have always aspired to integrate trajectory ethnography into my fieldwork, since I also seek to explore people's practices of and strategies for obtaining mobility), and I still regret that. Filming in Piraeus was intense and emotionally challenging, and somehow a bitter and disturbing experience. Instead of focusing on the visual fieldwork, I ultimately got overwhelmed and carried away by emotions of sadness, empathy and perhaps even also some guilt, when watching hundreds of newly arriving asylum seekers into Europe. In ethnographic writing and thought there is hitherto little room to reflect on as well as to give expression to the personal emotional sides of fieldwork. Even though the "ethnographic encounter", as mentioned, forms an intimate space for human recognition and (inter)subjective understanding between the ethnographer and his/her informants, the researcher's emotions within this intimate space are most often neglected (or only addressed when personal conflicts and relations between the ethnographer and informant(s) obstruct research practices). There is a limit, however, to what one can emotionally handle, particularly when bearing witness to human suffering and injustice. Hence, to conclude, I wish to stress that these affective and emotive sides of fieldwork, particularly in the context of research on excluded people, should receive much more attention and consideration in ethnographic thought and reflexivity. After all, anthropology is the study of what makes us human.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the participants of this study for taking their time and particularly for trusting me, especially when in such precarious situation, to share their experiences with me. I also wish to thank all NGO's who helped me to get access to interviewees and who provided useful insights and information. Thank you also to the organizers of the Summer School "Visual Ethnography of Cityscapes", the Athens Ethnographic Film Festival (Ethnofest) and the Netherlands Institute at Athens (NIA), for allowing me to participate in the summer school as a visiting scholar, as well as to give me time to do some fieldwork. Luna, thank you for accompanying me to Piraeus so early in the morning when the sun was barely up. And to conclude, Marion and Valerie, thank you for creating space, where there is almost none, to discuss what needs to be discussed yet largely remains in silence in academia.

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All photos are made by Afra Dekie.

Hearing privilege in Deaf space: when academia meets activism

LAURINE GROUX-MOREAU



My background

One of the things I get asked the most when I talk about my personal interests is “why this?” (it ranks almost as high as “is sign language universal?”[\[1\]](#)). The expected answer is that I must have some sort of personal connection: Deaf parents? A Deaf sibling perhaps? No such thing.

When I was almost 14, I met a deaf girl online. She told me about French Sign Language and gave me the link to a website that listed courses happening all over the country. I already had an interest in languages at the time (as a younger kid, I would spend hours on Encarta repeating short sentences that were available in many languages) and was immediately excited about the prospect of learning French Sign Language. A class was just starting in my town in Southern France, so I signed up for it. That was the beginning of my story with French Sign Language and the Deaf community.

A few years later, I moved to Nancy (France) in order to complete my undergraduate degree in linguistics. During that time, I discovered the Centre for Deaf Studies at the University of Bristol, and decided I would move to England once I had my degree. It was during my Master’s that I was able to critically

engage with Deaf Studies for the first time. This discipline has been mostly developed in English-speaking countries and France does not really have a comparable programme of study, though there are scholars who do similar work.

After a two-year gap, during which I completed my Postgraduate Diploma in Education then taught French for a year at a special school, I have now returned to the University of Bristol (minus the Centre for Deaf Studies, now closed) in order to do my PhD.

**“ Deaf Studies 101:
To explain it very briefly, Deaf
Studies is concerned with the
study of Deaf people as a cultural
and linguistic group.**

Academia and activism

At the beginning of my PhD in September 2014, my supervisor asked me to read about the relationship between academia and activism, and to reflect on it by writing an essay. I had a narrow-minded vision of activism. I thought the only people who could be called activists were loud and marched on the streets. As someone who does not cope well with crowds and worries anytime she strongly states her opinions in public (even if I do it anyway), I had never thought of myself as anything remotely resembling an activist.

When I began to read more about activism, I realised that the definition was a lot more inclusive than I had first assumed. Maxey (1999) for example

suggests that activism starts off mentally rather than physically. Indeed we may consider that activism is the consequence of human beings reflecting on their contribution to the world before taking action.

Following this initial essay, I have been thinking about the complexity of activism a huge amount, wondering about my place within academia and discovering the work of academics I now look up to, who I believe are carrying out activist work successfully.

I do not believe anymore that actions need to be “big” and “loud” in order to have an impact.

In a way, just everyday life in Deaf Studies is a form of activism in itself. Because the University of Bristol closed its Centre for Deaf Studies, considered a model all over the world, I am in the Department of Religion and Theology. My PhD has to do with a purpose-built deaf church from 19th century London. I have no background at all in this discipline. This scattering of Deaf Studies scholars can be seen as a step backwards in terms of being able to easily work and collaborate with other academics who work in our area of studies. At the same time, it means I come across people with whom I can share information about what I do, allowing me to spread the word about Deaf Studies.

The prevalence of the medical model of disability^[2] means that there is still a need to justify why Deaf Studies belongs to academia, and why it is even a discipline. Therefore, pushing for the social model over the medical model is a form of activism. There are still people arguing that there is no Deaf culture or stating that Deaf people are not oppressed. They may also see me use Deaf with a capital D and tell me I am inventing this.^[3] On the other hand, there are people who have simply never heard of

these things, or carry many misconceptions.

In response to those, I try to slowly but surely express my opinions, correct mistaken beliefs, and discuss Deaf and disability issues. I try to share my passion and change people's minds. These actions are not loud, but I hope they make a small difference.

Tensions and privilege

Being a hearing researcher in Deaf Studies means I have certain responsibilities. We are the privileged majority, and that privilege must be used wisely and not abused. For example, there is a long history of Deaf people being used as informants for hearing-led research. Then again, there are also hearing academics who have worked closely with the Deaf community without carrying on systematic oppression, making sure that Deaf team members were included as equals from the start. As time has gone by, the number of Deaf people becoming full-fledged researchers has increased, but they still face many institutional barriers, especially those who are also part of other minority groups.

I believe good practice must be embedded from the start of one's work, which is why I am starting to think about it now, at the start of my PhD. Many others are doing the same thing, which I hope will slowly improve things. I want my academic work to incorporate the wonderful things I see around me. When I was learning French Sign Language and saying I wanted to do a job that had to do with it, nearly everyone would say "so you want to help Deaf people". I guess this leads me to one of my most important principles: Deaf people don't need my help. Deaf people were activists together long before I was here and they will continue to advocate for themselves long after I am gone. Deaf people have

been fighting for their right to sign language and their human rights for over a century now. Yes, hearing people have been tagging along, but no, I am not here to give them my help. They have been getting on fine without me!

Bridging the gap between researchers and the Deaf community

So why am I here? First of all, I am here because I love it. Many of my interests converge in Deaf Studies. Being "here" is not enough, though. My current research involves working with archives so I could easily just not get involved with the Deaf community. I do not think that would be right, because I would basically be uncovering elements of Deaf history, an under-researched area... and keeping this information to myself (and the few academics that might be reading about it) instead of passing it across to the community. To me, that means I also need to try and be "useful", as Taylor (2014) eloquently put it.

Trying to get involved with the Deaf community can involve acknowledging and responding to tension, and I think that is fair enough. Wanting to be a good ally does not automatically mean Deaf people should give me the benefit of the doubt. You do not become a good ally just because you say you want to be one. It takes work, practice, and I made and will continue to make mistakes along the way.

Despite these potential difficulties, I do not think this can be avoided if you want to be a good Deaf Studies researcher. Unfortunately, there are people carrying out research that have no previous background in Deaf Studies and are not trying to bridge that gap between researchers and the Deaf

community in order to make their research respectful.

Last year, there were two events in the United Kingdom aimed at trying to find solutions and discuss how to bridge the gap between Deaf and hearing researchers and activists (and the categories of researchers, activists, Deaf and hearing people all obviously overlap). I think it is important to acknowledge that it is a work in constant progress.

Academia can be a slow process, which may be frustrating. In the recent months there has been a campaign going on in the United States about Deaf talent and how the movie industry is using hearing performers to play Deaf roles. I am not sure when that will get “officially” picked up by academics, and if there will be research done about the campaign itself and Deaf people’s views about the subject matter, but chances are if work is published it will not be for a while. Certain events and milestones of the Deaf community may also not be researched and recorded academically. That is where listening to Deaf activists and Deaf stories is important because sometimes in academia we think we have figured something out... only to realise the Deaf community has been saying that same thing for years and years. At the same time, being a researcher can give us a certain amount of credibility in the eyes of mainstream society. Senior researchers are more likely to be hearing, as Deaf researchers have only started to make it to the ranks of academia in more recent years. That is where power can be used and redistributed. For example, the Scottish Parliament took advice from (hearing) Professor Graham Turner in order to work on the British Sign Language Bill. [4] Through his work and that of others, Deaf people were able to give their input about the proposed Bill and communicate their views in British Sign

Language. This innovative initiative was extremely exciting to watch. When approaching my work, I look up to these projects as models.

Academia and identity

Doing Deaf Studies, the main feature that people may think about is the fact that I am hearing, versus being Deaf. However, that is not the whole story.

I am hearing, but I am also autistic, which is a less visible part of my identity. Bauman and Murray’s book *Deaf gain* (2014) makes a number of references to the neurodiversity movement, and I certainly have made those links myself throughout the journey that led to my diagnosis.

Being autistic has an influence over my research. There are certain things that I used to feel intellectually that I now feel in my guts since I started going to autism-related conference and events where non-autistic researchers and audience are the majority. Feeling this tension between autistic and neurotypical people helps me be even more attentive to issues within Deaf Studies, and helps bolster my academic research as well as my activism.

Being autistic also has an influence on my skills and abilities. As I struggle with social interactions, the only reason my English has improved is through reading books and watching a lot of television with subtitles. On the other hand, improving one’s British Sign Language skills requires more face-to-face exchanges, which can be difficult for me. As a result, I feel my slowly-developing language skills are not good enough to feel like a full-fledged Deaf Studies researcher. This has led me to be too apologetic and sometimes defensive about my position, because these deficits

also influence my ability to network and build relationships with other researchers. Being a neuroatypical researcher sometimes means I know all the things I should do, but my disability prevents me from achieving what I want to do because I cannot magically become neurotypical.

Working at an individual level

My identity impacts how I feel about what I do and what I write, and how much I want to make sure I do things well.

David Perry, a freelance journalist and historian, gives some of his principles for writing about disability:[\[5\]](#)

1. Listen.
2. Remember it's not about you.
3. Remember it's sometimes about you.
4. Mostly, though, it's not about you, so center the conversation where it belongs.
5. Don't expect gratitude; instead, accept criticism graciously.

These guidelines are extremely relevant in order to remember what is important and form, in my opinion, an excellent basis in order to link our research to activism. In a concrete way, how do I enact my activism, manage privilege and reduce tension, and help bridge the gap between communities?

First of all, I am trying to build relationships with the Deaf community and Deaf academics online. I was quite involved with the Deaf community in my French town, and my level of French Sign Language was decent enough. Upon moving to Bristol, though, it was all “new country, new people, new languages” and my sustained engagement was made harder

***“I do not believe anymore that actions need to be “big” and “loud” in order to have an impact.*”**

when I left academia for two years. Therefore, that is something I am trying to focus on including through alternative ways, such as Twitter. I also talk to Deaf academics, many of whom were activists before becoming academics.

I shut up a lot. Especially with social media, it can be tempting to participate in certain conversations, but there are times when hearing people need to step back.

I also speak up a lot... to other hearing people. Deaf people should not have to constantly educate others simply because they are Deaf. They should be able to exist and be left in peace if that is what they want to do. In reality, mainstream society often acts as though Deaf people should act a certain way if they want to be seen and treated as equals. I believe this is where hearing allies matter: I can switch off if I get burnt out about trying to explain things to people... Deaf people cannot switch off, they do not get a break. So the more people are around to encourage others to shift their perception, the better. That is, if it is done right and as long as we are not speaking over someone who is Deaf, in which case I go back to shutting up.

I have started writing a blog and am hoping that as my British Sign Language improves, I will be able to put articles in BSL. Recently, I have used my blog as a platform in order to share Deaf-related activism happening in France with the English-

speaking community, who may not otherwise learn about it. While I do not currently have a wide reach, I was lucky enough that my writing was picked up by BBC See Hear, a Deaf-led TV programme, which led to me being interviewed for one of their shows about the portrayal of Deaf people in the media. Another thing I try to do is to translate French information into English when I can, and create subtitles when important videos do not have them, in order to make them more accessible.

As I advance my career, I will continue sharing resources relevant to my research and making them available and accessible. At the same time, I acknowledge that some of my actions are not related to my research itself, yet I feel they are necessary engagement in order to support building relationships that help bridge the gap between communities.

Conclusion

Being an academic and an activist is not about being right the first time and being right all the time. It is about attitude and respect, and about striving to be better. Currently I do not feel I do enough to really own the term “activist” (which is a term I would like to feel more comfortable with), but certainly I am an academic whose interest in social justice and reflexivity blurs the boundaries between my professional and my private life. And I think it makes me a better student, a better researcher, and I hope a better person overall.

Last thoughts

Poem written and performed at the “Geo Slam” session at the Association of American Geographers Conference. Chicago, April 2015.



Who am I? Here I am a researcher.

Who am I? When I'm with you I am defined by the fact I'm hearing. You're Deaf and I'm hearing. That's how it goes.

And what do I do? I research your history and your Deaf Space. Your space isn't one physical place. It's everywhere and because it's everywhere it's also invisible. Because you're everywhere people think you are nowhere.

Who am I? I am autistic. I am also invisible.

Am I allowed to be autistic in an academic space I'm not sure. I hide. I don't say. Academia, are you making the space safe, well if you think you are well I think you're not.

My academic space that should also be fully yours. Your Deaf Space that will never be mine. My Autistic Space.

They collide and crash and after the crash I must reconstruct.

But it crashes again, and it collides and hurts.

Who am I.

What am I.

I am an academic.

I am hearing.

I am autistic.

Crash and collide all you want.

I'm still here.

NOTES

[1] No, it is not. That is why we talk about sign languages. The fact that there are so many sign languages is just as natural as the fact that there are so many spoken languages.

[2] That is, the idea that deaf people are defective and must be fixed.

[3] Conventionally, the capitalised term “Deaf” has been used to describe Deaf people as a cultural and linguistic group, versus deaf which describes an audiological status. While there are discussions as to whether this distinction has encouraged a dichotomy and is reductive, I have chosen to keep the capital D for the present piece.

[4] <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/83760.aspx> [Accessed 14th of June 2015]

[5] <http://www.thismess.net/2015/07/the-golden-rules-of-being-ally.html> [Accessed 15th of July 2015]

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Elizabeth Bartmess and David Perry kindly reviewed an earlier draft of this text, and their comments and feedback helped me improve it. Thank you so much for giving away some of your time for me, and for your suggestions. Jay Avery Rowe proofread my final version (any mistakes remaining are my responsibility only).

I would not have been able to attend this event without the funding provided to me by the University of Bristol’s Graduate School of Arts and Humanities Conference and Research fund. Thank you for making this available to me.

SHORT BIO

Laurine is an autistic PhD student at the University of Bristol. She blogs at <http://ohmyfrenchness.co.uk/>, tweets @laurinegrmo, podcasts about neurodiversity at <http://flappyhourcast.wordpress.com/> (episodes are fully transcribed).

Evening lecture and discussions



Janice Irvine


"Sex, Stigma, and the Persistence of Shame": This evening lecture by Janice Irvine, professor of sociology and expert in the field of sexualities, investigates the notion of sexuality research as dirty work. How come that doing research around sex and sexualities is often perceived as dirty work within and outside of academia? This question falls into line with the general topic of our workshop, which is all about how the personal identity and political activism of a researcher is linked with research topics and the academic environment. Guiding us through the history of sexuality research, Janice addresses gender differences in the experience of sexuality researchers, the speaker's benefit and burden, as well as the difficulty of publishing sexualities.

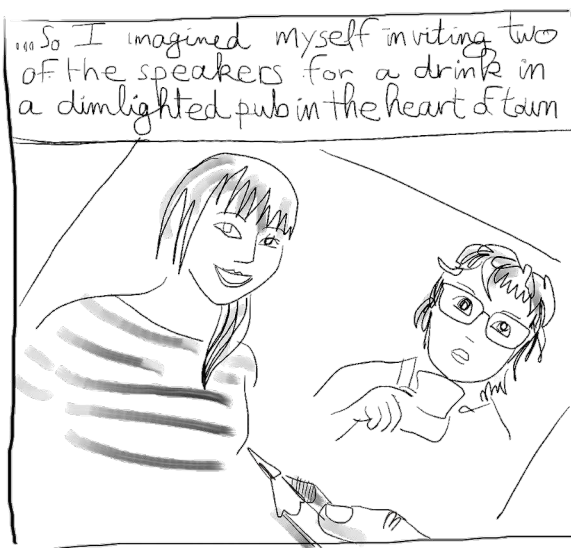
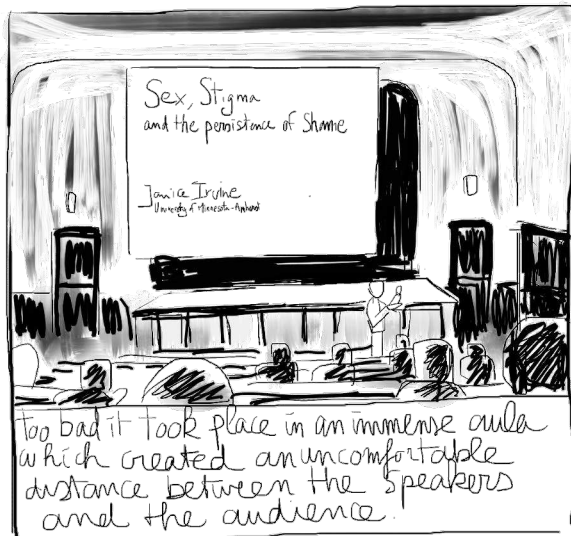
Respondents Bart Eeckhout, Noëmi Willemen and Nadia Fadil respond to Janice's notion of "dirty work" from their own personal and academic points of view.

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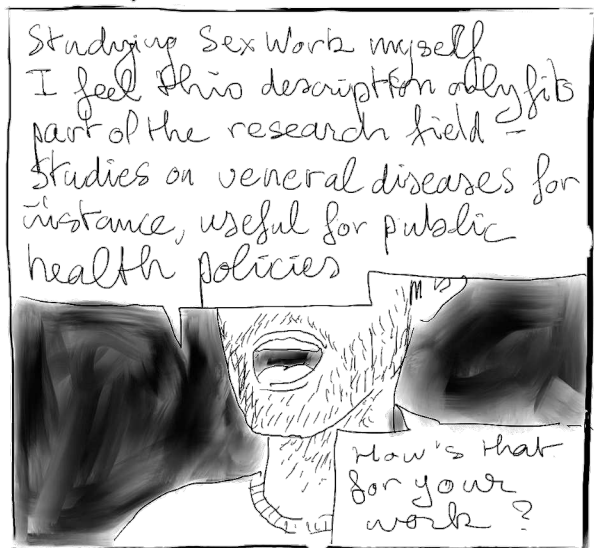
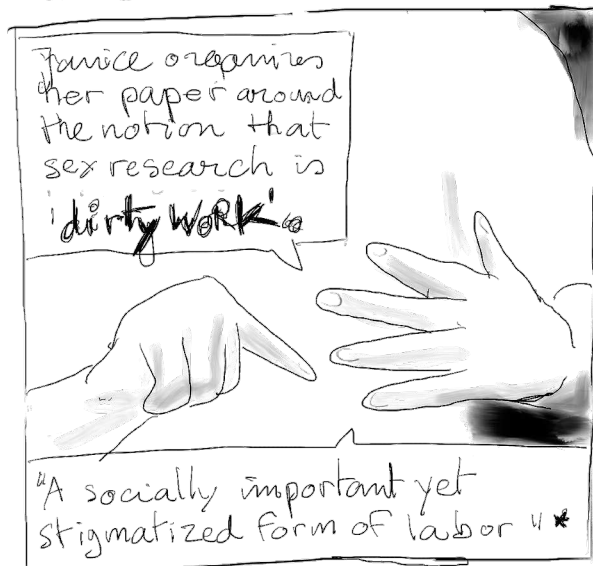
TALKING DIRTY ACADEMIC WORK

AGRAPHIC REPORT BY 



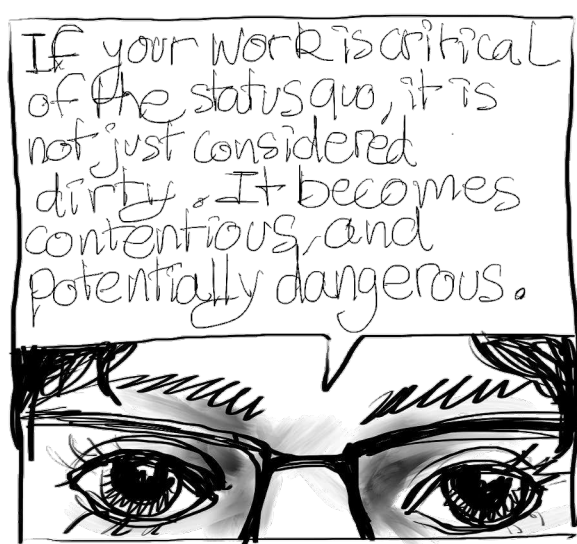
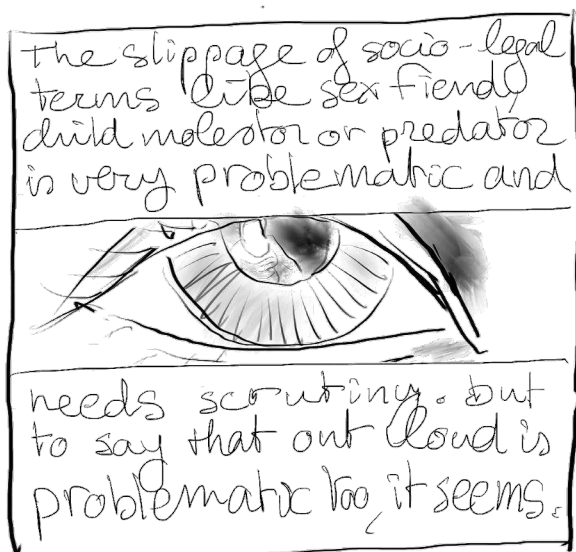
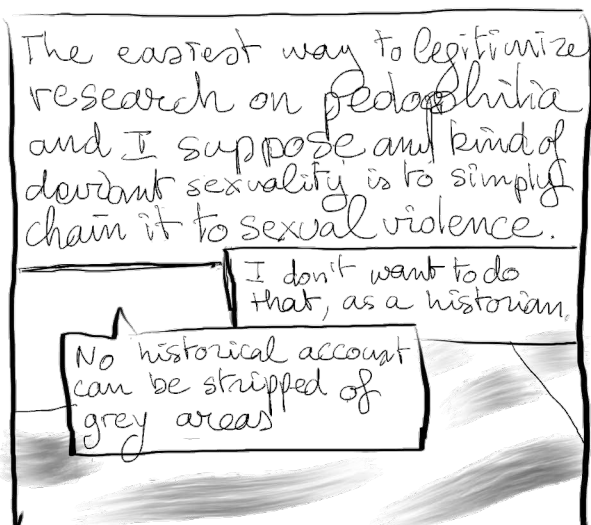
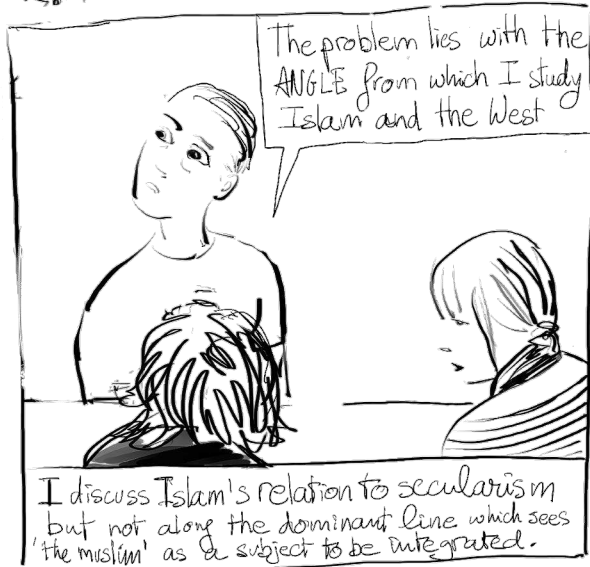
* Maarten Loopmans, Kuleuven, division of Geography, Belgium maarten.loopmans@kuleuven.be

1. IT'S A DIRTY JOB BUT SOMEBODY'S GOT TO DO IT



* E. Hughes (1962) Good People and dirty work, Social Problems, 10(1), 3-11.

2. A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE



3. A GENDERED POLITICS OF SHAME

Janice told us that WORKERS become DIRTY through the projection onto them of negative or DIRTY qualities of their work

- thus producing STIGMA -

sexuality researchers are, she claims, vulnerable of being SEXUALIZED



Doing research on sex work I have also received these smirking comments from colleagues

And even when not, I feel the need to add a disclaimer that I am not a John in disguise when I talk about it.

That's what Janice called 'FELT STIGMA'

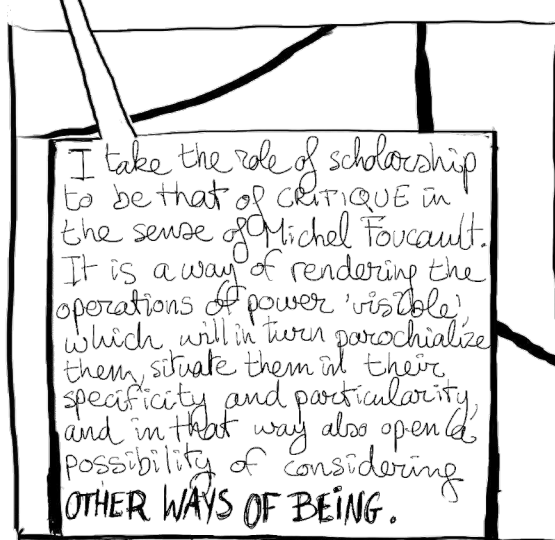
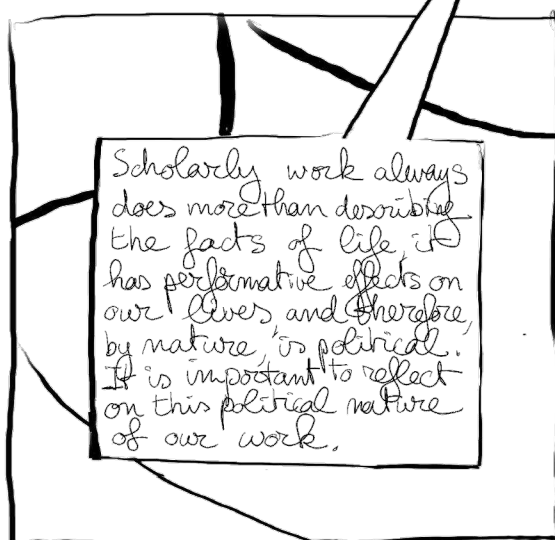
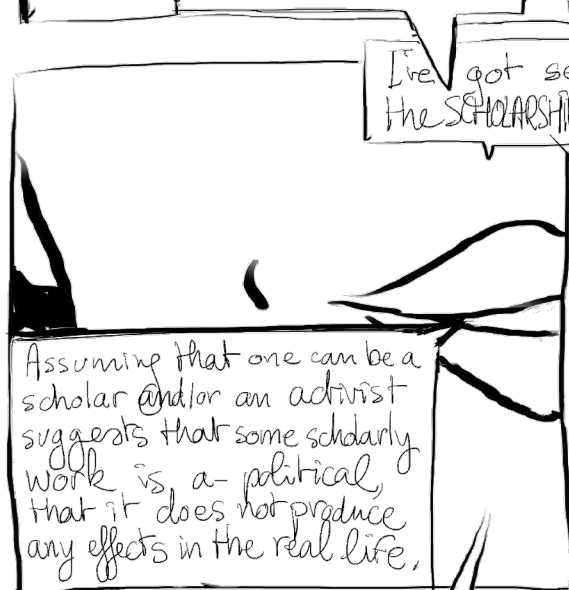
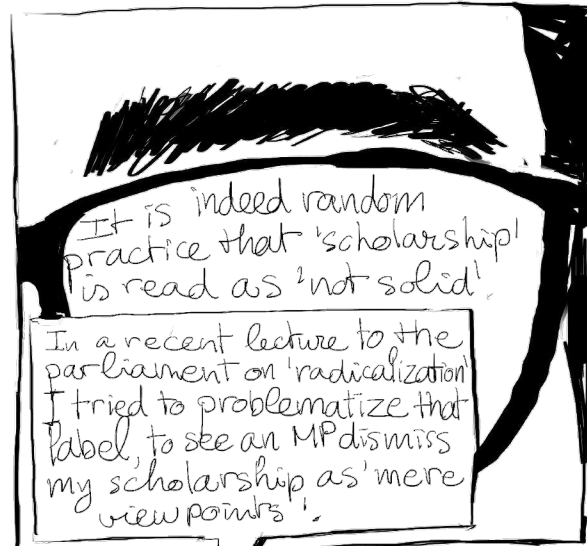
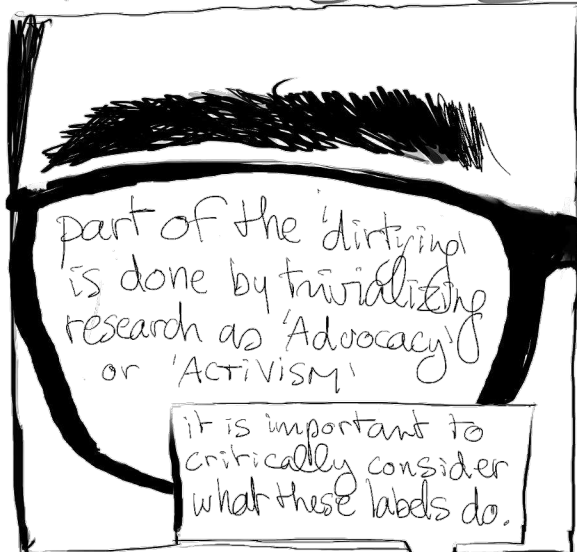
The knowledge itself that overt stigmatizing practices are possible affects our practices as researchers.

The politics of shame operates both directly and indirectly upon us as researchers.

And it's a gendered politics, its effects depending on the topic. Time and again, I have been told that given my subject it's a good thing that I am a young woman and not a middle aged man. Otherwise they'd be worried.

As if it depends on your sexual orientation or gender whether a particular research can be taken serious or not?

4. Navelgazing activists



Of course the conversation ended,
somehow, prematurely.

My collocutors went (home?)
and left me, puzzled and
intrigued.

In a way I hope I was
not the only one.

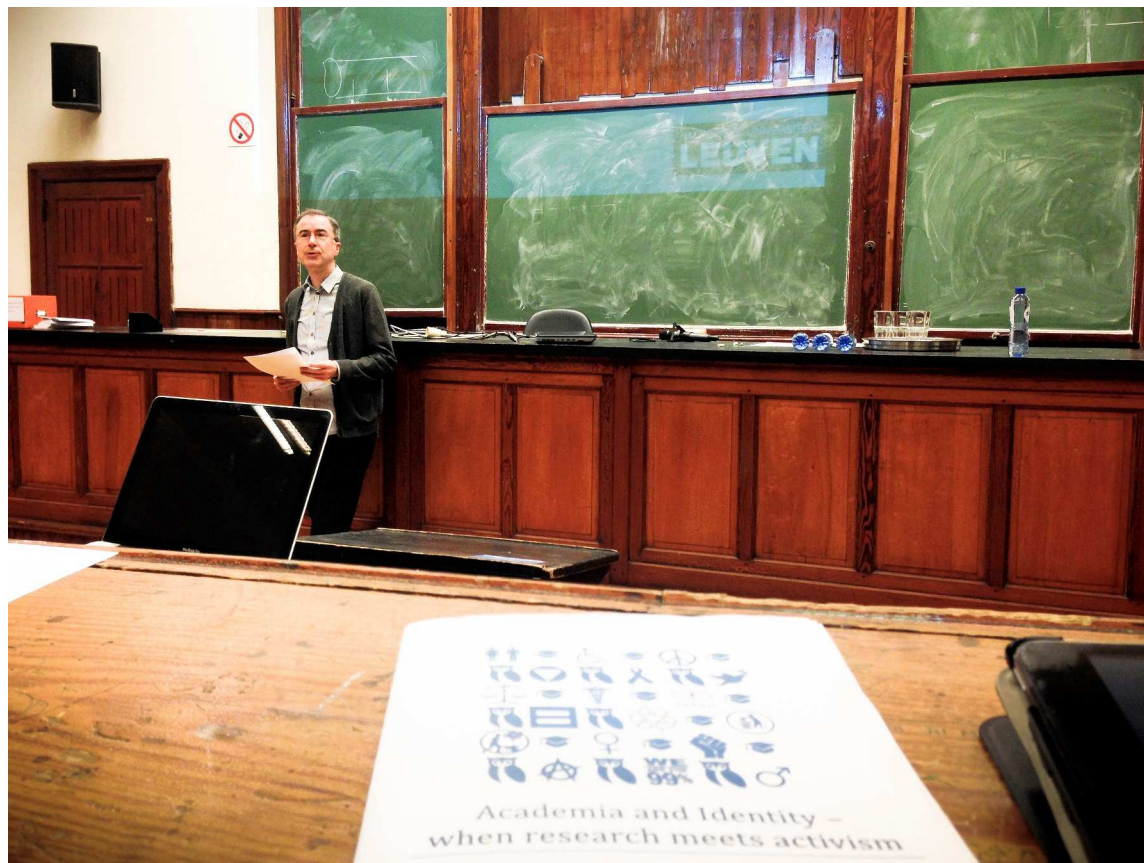


Kosant Adam
(1) 6/03 1/15/16



PHOTO BY
VITORIA COFFEY

“*In our universities, sexuality and gender identity are nowhere on the bureaucratic radar.*”



Academia and Activism: My Ten Propositions

BART EECKHOUT

Before I propose any bold statements, I should probably situate myself very briefly: I teach English and American literature at the University of Antwerp. Ever since I moved to this university some ten years ago, I've been teaching a course on queer fiction and supervising BA and MA papers on LGBTQ topics as well as various research projects in the field. In the latter case, I've been collaborating with a colleague in the media department, Alexander Dhoest, and one in the history department, Henk de Smaele. My academic work in this field is intimately tied up with my commitment as an activist in the Flemish LGBTQ movement. For nearly ten years also, I've been on the Board of Directors of *çavaria*, which currently unites over 130 LGBTQ grassroots organizations.

For maximum effectiveness, I will work with ten propositions in the tradition of the manifesto, though not always in that style.

PROPOSITION 1. When we look at LGBTQ activism and academic research in Flanders today, the larger social picture is very mixed. Both by international standards and from a historical perspective, the situation is a privileged one. Some of the privilege is due to the effectiveness of what feminist scholars have called the velvet triangle, that semi-formalized collaboration between activists, academic researchers, and policy-makers. This part of the story has been an enabling one. But another part is disabling: it has to do with problems of scale, and with opportunities for academic institutionalization. Here I think we should distinguish carefully between academic and activist levels: while at the academic level, LGBTQs in Flanders lack the numbers to establish formal research teams, regular publication venues, network associations, annual conferences, and so forth, at the activist level they have managed to build up sufficient critical mass and ensure systematic revenues to be exceptionally professional by international standards. In this sense, it's clear that the pink version of the velvet triangle hasn't been there to sponsor academic research, only to support an activist agenda. LGBTQs in Flemish academia aren't nearly so securely institutionalized as they are in civil society.

PROPOSITION 2. The interuniversity MA program in gender and diversity launched in 2014-2015 is a good example of how the lack of clout of LGBTQs in Flemish academia has resulted in a missed opportunity to put sexual diversity on the institutional map. As a result, we continue to be stuck academically: nowhere in our university system is there an adequate undergraduate or graduate training that prepares students for

advanced doctoral research on LGBTQ issues. If a young researcher wants to join international debates among experts, almost everything depends on the quantum leaps he or she is able to make at very short notice through solitary self-study.

PROPOSITION 3. The lack of clout on the part of Flemish LGBTQ academics finds its expression also in our universities' diversity plans. Though my knowledge of the subject is limited, I haven't heard of any attention to sexuality and gender identity in these plans: university administrations translate diversity automatically into inequalities between men and women, the need for ethnic diversity, and the integration of people with disabilities. In our universities, sexuality and gender identity are nowhere on the bureaucratic radar.

PROPOSITION 4. My personal experience of the last ten years tells me that there are no systematic disparities in granting funds to LGBTQ research in Flanders today, but that there are *un*-systematic disparities, and that they cut both ways. On the one hand, Alexander Dhoest, Henk de Smaele, and I were definitely able to profit from a lucky windfall in our LGBTQ applications a few years ago. I've also heard through the grapevine that my own activism was considered a bonus when I came up for promotion two years ago. So those are examples of positive discrimination. On the other hand, I've also twice had the experience of grant-awarding committees without any competence on LGBTQ issues deciding to overrule the advice of international experts. On one occasion this was blatant: the international experts reviewing our application were so unanimously enthusiastic that

the committee decided to treat their advice as biased. But this, too, I know only through the grapevine. In the absence of transparent decision-making processes where such committees may be held accountable, we're left to speculate about the extent to which our activist applications are subjected to unfair or discriminatory treatment. We have no reliable facts and figures in this regard.

PROPOSITION 5. After years of devising funding applications, I can only confirm that LGBTQ research tends to suffer from a degree of self-censorship as a result of stigma and shaming. Self-censorship has multiple causes. I find that a major constricting role today is played by formal protocols, which are being pushed to such a level of specialization and competition that the possibilities for proposing new topics are being narrowed down all the time. But there's also the undeniable inclination to avoid topics because they may not play well with funding authorities. To give one quick example that illustrates how LGBTQ identities have become increasingly desexualized: for years now, I've wanted to study a cluster of thought-provoking and complex writings in contemporary American literature that depict scenarios of underage gay sexual experience, often in imbalanced relationships with adults, sometimes including rape and other forms of abuse. I'm thinking of Samuel Delany's *Hogg*, which was long held to be unpublishable, Sarah Schulman's *The Child*, and several works by Matthew Stadler and Dennis Cooper. But what Janice Irvine calls the "felt stigma" is such that I haven't been able to muster the courage to associate myself with this topic in the form of an application for funding. So out goes the uncomfortable sex.



PROPOSITION 6. By and large, the career prospects for young researchers in the humanities and social sciences with an activist commitment to LGBTQ studies in Flanders seem to me dismal. From my privileged position as a tenured professor I've been watching this for quite a while now and I'm afraid I can't think of a single young LGBTQ researcher who has been able to get a fully tenured position so far. Fortunately, some are at a stage where they may still do so, but I've seen a lot of academic talent disappear. Here again we pay the price for a lack of institutional interest in giving longevity and structural security to LGBTQ research.

PROPOSITION 7. I'm afraid that time management for activist LGBTQs in academia is like entering the Bermuda triangle. Sad as it is, I've become convinced that if you want to combine a fulltime academic career, long-term commitment as an activist, and a personal relationship and/or family life, you will be swallowed up by the triangle.

PROPOSITION 8. Since most academics working on LGBTQ issues give priority, understandably, to their academic work and their personal relationships, the interaction with LGBTQ activism tends to suffer. There used to be a time when several academics held leading positions as lobbyists or served on the Board of *çavaria*, but I've seen them all withdraw over the years, including a couple of my PhD students. As a result, there's only me left. In terms of intellectual leadership and academic input, I don't consider this a healthy evolution.

PROPOSITION 9. I know from the world of activism that great personal involvement also entails an enhanced risk of sudden and complete burnout. This is especially noticeable in the quick turnover of activists, who often pitch in for a while and then suddenly give up, frequently for health reasons. I wonder how this translates into our academic environments. Nowadays my university is very concerned about our faculty's stress levels, but I haven't seen any evidence that there's also an awareness of a specifically enhanced risk of burnout among young researchers whose sense of identity is strongly linked with their social commitment.

PROPOSITION 10. What I find most frustrating in the current Flemish situation is to observe how the numerically powerless suffer active neglect, both at the activist and academic levels: I'm thinking especially of the intersexed, the asexuals, sexual refugees, the polyamorous, and sex workers. These individuals, who are frequently too isolated to build grassroots organizations, are all too easily regarded as of insufficient interest to society at large and too marginal to become the center of activist and academic attention. The result is that in Flanders they continue to be almost entirely invisible and, to most people, quite simply don't exist.



Epilogue



Marion and Valerie, slightly overwhelmed.

Looking at this booklet, we are very happy and proud.

We were slightly overwhelmed with the great response to our initial call for contributions to this small workshop on academia and identity we had in mind. The speakers' stories, the attendees' response and the vivid conversations in-between showed, that all of us are concerned with the intersections of our personal lives, our activism and our work as academics. We are very thankful for the intimately personal and insightful contributions to this day. As activists, young academics, organizers and individuals, we feel we learned a lot from this day. This booklet shows that academics want to engage with civil society, and that their thinking goes much further than the often criticized ivory tower of academia. We would like to thank all the contributors for their work and for being so open-minded: by talking about our experiences we come to realize, that our struggles and weaknesses are often at the same time our biggest strengths. Academia and identity are inextricably entangled with each other, and we believe that as scientists we should embrace this mutual influence and take a situated and reflexive approach towards our scientific and activist work.

**Marion Wasserbauer &
Valerie De Craene**



what do you
think of
Academic
Social
Responsibility?

We
are



all



it
(really)
is a
task
for
scientists
to
de-
construct
science
&
innovation
!!

We ARE CITIZENS ...



Activists



in
≠



Ways



At times, it proves to be difficult to find a balance between trying to build an academic career and conforming to existing evaluation criteria while also confronting and tackling hegemonic and institutionalized ideas of what constitutes good research. It's a delicate exercise where the challenge to play the game while simultaneously trying to change the rules of the game, often leads to ethical, methodological and strategic dilemmas. Being involved in research on identity and a commitment in identity politics shapes, questions, challenges, and redefines our own identity and touches upon the researcher's body. Consequently, our personal and professional lives are intrinsically linked and the motivation to shape or change academic and political debates only grows stronger.

The workshop "Academia and identity - when research meets activism" held in March 2015 in Leuven, aimed to create a space to discuss these complex issues. This magazine collects the stories and reflections of the workshop's participants and provides insight into their balance between academic work at the one hand, and the commitment to the politics of identity on the other - in all its messiness and potential failure.

“

I came to the realization that the key to my research was to embrace the dualities in my identity

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