

The Freedom of Anthropological Fieldwork

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Freedom

Anthropological fieldwork has been characterised variously in terms of rite de passage, heroic achievement, ordeal, holiday, anxiety, loneliness and insecurity. But it can also offer an overwhelming experience of freedom, an opportunity to try out new ideas or another way of living, and to transcend old strictures.

Before I studied anthropology I studied anthropology. Let me rephrase and clarify this seemingly nonsensical sentence: Before I studied cultural anthropology I studied philosophical anthropology. Both disciplines just called themselves ‘anthropology’, each assuming apparently that *its* study comprised the truly relevant knowledge of human beings (in those days, we simply called it the study of *man*).¹ Later, when cultural anthropology entered my life, I saw the precious

complementarity – and indeed partial overlapping – of the two approaches to the question of what kind of beings human beings are.

My introduction to philosophy came in the 1960s, when phenomenology and existentialism were the dominant schools. The most celebrated authors were German and French: Heidegger, Sartre, Marcel and – most importantly – Merleau-Ponty. I was reminded of my philosophical youth when I saw ‘Freedom’ announced as the next theme for this journal *Etnofoor*. Freedom was/is a crucial ingredient of the existential phenomenology I was brought up with and which has stayed with me since. The philosophers mentioned above emphasise that ‘man’ is free *because* he is a subject. Being a subject is contrasted to being an object, a thing. A thing is what it is and its being can be explained by its ‘antecedents’, the processes that caused and deter-

mined what it is.² But man is not simply what he is. His existence cannot be explained simply by his antecedents. A subject is conscious of his self; he reflects on what happened in the past and is oriented towards a future. Being reflexive and knowing different options in life implies freedom. Consciousness regarding past and future necessitates making choices. Even *not* making a choice is a choice, a decision, however tacit and automatic that decision may seem.

‘My’ philosophers did not deny that every person has antecedents, a past that to a large extent influences (limiting or facilitating) the practical choices he can make. But in the end, everyone can decide to be someone else than his past has prepared him for. A disabled person can (try to) climb mountains or run a marathon. A plumber can become an anthropologist (I know one) and vice-versa. I add ‘try’ because the freedom lies in the trying, not in the successful outcome. A prisoner is therefore as ‘free’ as a free person. *Die Gedanken sind frei*. The philosophers call the total of human antecedents ‘facticity’. Freedom is transcending facticity. A human being cannot *not* decide. He is ‘condemned to be free’, according to a famous one-liner by Sartre.

These philosophy lessons about being a subject and being free have in fact been part of my facticity, the baggage that I have carried with me throughout my life, as member of a family, friend, colleague, anthropologist, citizen and so forth. They have helped me to live as I did, but they never determined what I did, thought or desired. I often also chose to deviate from what they told me to do or to be.

Long ago, someone interviewed me about the choices I had made in my life to become what I was: a

medical anthropologist. I answered that I had rarely made a decision at decisive moments in my life. My life had been the result of fortunate coincidences, I argued. The parents I had, the person I married, the children we got, the fieldwork in Ghana, my professorship – everything had just happened. I have repeated that same view in some of my lectures and publications. One of my favourite references was to a psychologist, Herbert A. Simon, who somewhere claimed that rational decision-making – as is, for example, thought to be practised in economics – is not possible in the strict sense of the term. No one can ever know all the consequences of all the options that are available when taking a decision. One of his preferred examples was chess, a game that has the reputation of being the summit of rational decisions. No player is able to foresee all the outcomes of all permutations, therefore no decision is rational in the sense that it has been possible to weigh all possible decisions before taking the best one. The same can of course be said about finding a partner, having children, choosing a career, and so on.

Talking about doing fieldwork, I also tend to express doubt about the possibility of taking clever decisions during research. Serendipity has been a leading phenomenon in much of my research. Unplanned happenings often ‘took decisions’ for me and pushed the research in a certain direction. During my MA fieldwork, the unexpected death and funeral of a woman decided for me how to proceed with the research and how to write and structure my thesis. Where was my freedom, where were the autonomous decisions that I took to reach my goals? Had I just been a plaything of circumstance?

In retrospect, I realise that my answer during the interview mentioned above and my claims about not making choices were only partly correct. All my so-called non-decisions had been decisions after all. My 'passivity' as a subject was an unmistakable proof of freedom. I could have said 'no' to all of the invitations that coincidence threw at me. The ability to say no or yes is an inherent part of my being a subject, a person. Moreover, serendipity implies a special type of agency: seeing what tends to be overlooked, concentrating on what seems to be irrelevant.

This may sound rather abstract. In moral debates, court cases, political proclamations, therapy sessions, social work and so forth, people speak very differently about freedom and responsibility. Many culprits, clients or outcasts are excused for their wrongdoings and failures because they are regarded as not being responsible for their actions but rather being the victims of circumstance.

Clearly, in this essay I am writing about another type of freedom. Of course, I recognise that people may be severely restricted when taking practical decisions that will benefit them and let them live happily and comfortably. Their facticity may pull them down and make them fatalistic, but they nevertheless remain subjects who can accept, embrace or reject their fate.

How can these philosophical 'murmurations' be linked to anthropological fieldwork? How can fieldwork be an exceptional experience of freedom, as I announced in the first lines of this essay?

Fieldwork

Fieldwork has been widely praised as the crown jewel of anthropology. Staying and moving with the people one studies and sharing their daily lives is our unique research technique, not practised by any other discipline of social and cultural enquiry. Yet, paradoxically, it was the legendary 'founder' of anthropological fieldwork, Bronislaw Malinowski, who was found to have been bored, depressed, lonely and frustrated during his fieldwork among the Trobrianders a hundred years ago. As we all know, his personal diary, discovered after his sudden death in 1942 and published in 1967, sent a shockwave through anthropology. Although he mentioned Trobriand friends and wrote about the excitements of fieldwork, what drew most attention were his outbursts of anger and frustration about the local people, his worries about his health, his longing for the blessings of British civilisation, his frequent visits to Europeans and Australians living in the area, and his pining while thinking of his absent fiancée. Malinowski's tormented life as a fieldworker prompted not only anthropological colleagues to reflect on the vicissitudes of fieldwork, but also inspired literary writers. One of them, the Dutch writer/anthropologist Gerrit Jan Zwier (2003), wrote a novel about an anthropologist by the name of Bron. By changing the name of the hardly concealed Malinowski, he created a way to enter into the head of the main character: his thoughts, desires, folly and dreams. Obviously, much of the novel springs from the author's imagination, but the facts are largely correct, in particular the final pronouncement of the renowned fieldworker: 'Never

fieldwork again!' Indeed, Malinowski was never to conduct fieldwork again.³

In another novel, *Allemaal projectie* (All projection), Zwier (1980a) tells the story of an anthropologist who is so scared of doing fieldwork that he secretly stays home and employs a Moroccan assistant to do the research for him. When his fraud is threatened with discovery, he flies to Morocco and takes up residence in a hotel, while the assistant continues doing the work.

After the dust of Malinowski's diary had settled, a remarkable number of anthropologists began to write critical reflections and 'confessions' about their own fieldwork. I must again refer to Zwier (1980b), who wrote a somewhat provocative overview of the anxieties and other emotional problems that anthropologists in the past years had reported – often in just a few lines, if not between the lines. His book was almost unanimously rejected by anthropologists as sensational, journalistic, one-sided, not representative and 'mythographic'. But history has proved Zwier right; for many, fieldwork had not been the exciting, rewarding and productive period that they had expected. The more hidden dimensions of fieldwork became a common theme to write about. As MacClancy and Fuentes (2010: 1) have remarked:

Since the mid-1980s they [anthropologists] have made critical scrutiny of their practice a legitimate and revealing topic of study. They have inquired, among other themes, into fieldwork relations and rapport; conflicts, hazards, and perils in the field; the continuously negotiated identity of the fieldworker; the blurring of private life and research boundaries; the ethics, and the erotics of fieldwork;

the status and types of reflexive ethnography; the popularization of the discipline via accounts of fieldwork; and so on.

Reflections on the shadowy side of fieldwork (McLean & Leibing 2007) have also served to prepare students better for the experience. Amy Pollard interviewed 16 of her PhD students about their fieldwork for that purpose. Her article reads as a litany of misery. In her own words:

This study seeks to document some of the difficulties that PhD anthropologists at three UK universities have faced. It describes [in alphabetic order] a range of feelings as experienced by 16 interviewees: *alone, ashamed, bereaved, betrayed, depressed, desperate, disappointed, disturbed, embarrassed, fearful, frustrated, guilty, harassed, homeless, paranoid, regretful, silenced, stressed, trapped, uncomfortable, unprepared, unsupported, and unwell* (Pollard 2009: 1, emphasis added).

In the conclusion, she rightly points out that this gloomy picture of fieldwork was partly the outcome of her topic (difficulties). Nevertheless, the responses of the students remain significant.

Rachel Irwin (2007) focused on culture shock, brought about by doing fieldwork in an unfamiliar culture. Quoting Oberg (1960: 177), she describes culture shock as 'precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse'.

When the symbols used to describe and conceptualise the world are alien, this can lead to feelings of isolation or even a loss of identity. The security resulting from one's taken-for-grantedness disappears and one feels ill at ease. In a sense, culture shock is an illness resulting from the loss of meaning brought about when people from one symbolic reality find themselves immersed in another, typically through long-term travel (Irwin 2007: 1).

Emma Louise Backe refers to both previous authors when she describes the depression and anxiety she suffered during her own fieldwork in Fiji, South Pacific.

Throughout my undergraduate degree, we never discussed the emotional or physical challenges of fieldwork—it was always framed as this transformative, clarifying experience during which the theory we worked so assiduously to grasp could finally be applied. It was understood that every anthropologist inherently falls in love with their site, integrates into their chosen community, and concludes their fieldwork with a sense of kinship and satisfaction at the rich ethnographic data and knowledge they have been able to accumulate (Backe 2015: 1).

But reality was different. Her own story is offered as advice to students who are thoroughly educated in theory and methodology, but do not hear about the other – seemingly more mundane – aspects of fieldwork (cf. Bleek 1978).

Freedom in fieldwork

This excursion into the problems – and sometimes traumas – of fieldwork serves as an introduction to the more cheerful 'confession' about fieldwork that I want to share with the readers of this special issue. Mainly for two reasons. The contrast serves as a stylistic device to make the good news sound better. But it also warns the reader that my experiences are not 'representative'. They may even be exceptional, though I doubt this. For some slightly masochistic reason and – at the same time – as an indirect proof of heroism, emphasising the hardness of the experience may be more attractive and credible today than singing its praises. A comfortable and happy fieldwork could well be a sign of superficiality or – worse – raise the suspicion that it was a kind of holiday (Rutten 2007).

When I first read Irwin's above quote, I had a strange twinge of inverted recognition. The absence in the field of familiar beliefs and symbols that gave meaning and security to my pre-fieldwork life did not cause an experience of isolation, insecurity or loss of identity for me, but rather created feelings of freedom and excitement. Returning to what I wrote about my early lessons in philosophy, moving from my cultural comfort zone to another world and trying to live the lives of the people around me made me strongly aware of the 'antecedents' of my upbringing in Dutch society: born into a deeply catholic family, educated in an all-male boarding school, and having missionary ambitions, to mention a few prominent antecedents. Helped by perhaps overromantic expectations, I was, however, ready to put them aside – or rather 'between brackets' – to explore new visions about life. My attitude was an act of inner

freedom that was facilitated by the new environment. Living in a small Ghanaian town, staying with various local families and making friends in that community helped and encouraged me to 'transcend my facticity'. It did not seduce me, however, to 'go native'. I felt uneasy, for example, when friends persuaded me to wear a traditional mourning cloth at a funeral. But I did take more hidden decisions to try out other ways of being a subject, a person.

The anthropologist Srinivas has called the experience of fieldwork in a different culture a 'second birth'.⁴ After the first birth in his own culture, the anthropologist starts as it were a new life in the society where he conducts his research. He experiences a third birth upon arriving back home: much of what used to be familiar may have become alien by then. The idea of second birth was frequently confirmed by comments of people around me who said that I was doing well learning their culture and language, and by common proverbs describing the stranger as a child or a person who is excused when he breaks the rules – he can't help it, he is still a child.⁵ These proverbs became living reality when the six-year-old son of my first landlord took my hand and led me through the town teaching me the Twi words for 'house', 'door', 'bucket', 'water', 'goat' and so on.

But let me offer some more serious examples of my second birth and newfound freedom. During my first fieldwork in Ghana (1971), I studied tensions and conflicts in one matrilineal extended family. It confronted me with a much more relaxed sexual culture than the one in which I had grown up. I felt receptive to the liberal attitude among Ghanaian friends and other people around me. A related discovery was the

ease and frequency of separation and divorce in marital and consensual unions. Marriage, some people told me using a proverb, is like 'Let's go for a walk',⁶ which was then contrasted to family bonds that could never be undone. Marriage could be a short affair that ended without the dramatic and traumatic consequences that divorce often had in my own society. 'End of love' (*Ɔɔɔ asa*) or boredom (*Mabre awaree*, literally: I am tired of marriage) could be reasons, but there were also more 'practical' concerns such as family interference and infertility. There was a common belief that when the 'blood' between two partners did not match, children would not be forthcoming. In this case, the couple agreed to separate in good faith and try their luck with other partners.

'Nuclear families' (the term does not have an equivalent in Twi) could consist of children from three or more different parents. The taken-for-granted ease with which these brothers and sisters interacted with each other and with their various parents impressed me. I began to look at the Dutch marital system as somewhat narrow minded and a manifestation of parental egoism. Why this extreme and exclusive concern about one's own biological children, I thought. This resistance to 'parental egoism' never left me.

A third 'discovery' was a surprise to me: when I observed how the two wives of my family head behaved to one another, like sisters living in the same house, my opinion about polygamy as a marital option became more favourable. In the evening, when it became dark, the old man would sit in front of his room and the two wives each sat in front of their rooms. A lantern shed a soft *clair-obscur* over the three and added to the peacefulness of their conversation. But after some time, when

I became more involved in the domestic gossip, I realised that it was not only sisterly solidarity that linked them. Once I woke up in the middle of the night because of a fierce fight between the two women, while the old man tried in vain to calm them. Mutual envy was another part of the polygamy in our house. The Twi term for co-wife, *kora*, confirmed this, as it also means ‘jealousy’. But, I argued, is jealousy also not a common phenomenon between ‘real’ sisters? And between relatives in general? In spite of my scepticism, I retained a slightly positive opinion in general about polygamous unions. That shift in my thinking demonstrated to me the freedom of transcending ‘antecedents’ that fieldwork made possible.

My second period of fieldwork focused on sexual relationships and birth control. It followed immediately after the first period and took place in the same community, mainly in the same family. The topic was a logical continuation of the first, and its influence on my personal ideas and – to some extent – way of life was a continuation as well. When I finally did return home, I realised that my new views about marriage were not shared by those in my immediate environment, even though Dutch society was then (in the mid-1970s) celebrating its climax of sexual liberty.

The most incisive ‘factor’ that fed my experience of freedom was, however, my friendship with Kwasi Asante-Darko, someone with very different antecedents. We knew each other from the University of Ghana, where we studied and lived in the same hall. Kwasi decided to accompany me on my fieldwork, even though the research was not relevant to his own studies. Through the research, we grew closer to one another. Never in my life had I been in a situation where I was

so closely linked to another person. We lived together in a small room (two by four meters), we slept in the same bed, ate the same food, shared the same adventures and wrote together two common diaries, one about our life with the family we were staying with and one about events in the town. We were completely dependent on one another. He told me intimate things and secrets from his own life and I did the same about mine.

The extra value of our relationship was that I began to see life in the community through his eyes. It brought me closer to the experiences of the people in the family. Moreover, he explained to me what specific information actually meant and what was behind the stories we recorded. At night, we had long conversations about what we had heard and seen that day or about our own lives. Those conversations were sometimes so intense that we could not sleep and decided simply to get some more transcription work done (in the dim light of a kerosene lamp).

Nobody can do anthropological research and not be affected by it. Generally, people develop their personality through experiences and events in their lives: relationships with parents and other kin, with friends, lovers, teachers, others..., books, films, travels, et cetera. Doing anthropological fieldwork is such an event, but one that is likely to be more incisive and to have a more lasting influence on one’s later life than many other experiences (Van der Geest 2004: 581; Van der Geest et al. 2012).

To ‘test’ my personal experiences, I invited five colleagues, all former PhD students, to comment on the draft text of this essay and share their own experiences of fieldwork. Four responded: three women

(Francine, Janneke and Miranda) and one man (Daniël). All three women mentioned depressing and irritating experiences next to memories of happiness and freedom. Daniël only spoke of his excitement during fieldwork. Francine remembered that during her research in Ghana in the late 1970s, about perceptions on fertility/infertility among women wanting to have more children, she was not taken seriously because she had no children and was therefore not an adult woman herself. She also had the impression that the local women and girls considered her a potential rival or threat and were less willing to talk to her than she had expected.

The nuisance of sexual advances were mentioned by both Francine and Miranda. In Ghana, men made sexually tinted remarks to which Francine did not know how to respond. She did not want to offend people but could not find the humour to react properly. Her uneasiness was particularly strong when a chief told her that he wanted to marry her. People around her assured (jokingly?) that no one could refuse anything to a chief. Such sexual jokes were often linked to her being an attractive entrance to Europe. This double harassment for sex and money was also brought up by Miranda, who had worked in Guatemala, Benin and Tanzania. 'You are meat with money; they hunt you', she said. Men found her 'too bitchy' because of the way she pushed them off.

Miranda suffered when she was in Benin; she was sick for seven weeks because of bad water, poor food and other physical and hygienic challenges. On top of that, she often felt lonely.

Janneke, who did research among extremely poor women in Malawi, said she often felt insecure about

how to behave in the company of others, but – she admitted – she felt that even more strongly at home. In Malawi, she knew that people would excuse her for mistakes, much less so at home.

These 'negative' experiences were both contrasted and connected to positive ones. The challenges of poverty, sickness, loneliness, sexual harassment and boredom made them stronger and 'wiser'. Miranda:

It is about finding out that you are able to deal with these challenges, that despite you being in a place where you don't understand anything, you start to understand and co-create meaning and build a social life. And you do this all alone, without the safety of existing friendships or family, or a social group you belong to. So yes, you go from being and feeling vulnerable to feeling confident that you can overcome these challenges and build new relationships, and have fun! And for me, and I reckon others too, this experience made me look at people and myself in new ways – just being more at ease with myself and with others, no matter how strange they are. And caring much less about what others think of you, how you look, or what you want them to think about you. It is easier now to look for what I see as most important: is someone truthful, honest, open, welcoming and non-judgemental? I am excited to meet someone who is different. My ability to relativise has grown enormously thanks to my fieldwork experiences.⁷

The fieldwork 'problems' had contributed to their identity and sense of being free. One could indeed call fieldwork an initiation ritual, Miranda concluded.

All four mentioned that fieldwork had brought them into contact with people whom they would never have met otherwise: prostitutes in Guatemala and Malawi, farming families in Zambia, schoolgirls in Ghana and village children in Benin and Tanzania. Some of these became unexpected friends. Fieldwork is indeed a means or excuse to enter other people's lives, which proved an enormous enrichment. Daniël, who did his fieldwork in Zambia, said that excitement about the people he met constituted his overwhelming experience of freedom. Miranda believes that she will draw upon her fieldwork experience for the rest of her life. Fieldwork, she said, is a luxury. It allows you to distance yourself from your familiar social context and other 'usual suspects' and find fascinating 'unusual suspects'; it 'forces you to accept the freedom you have been afraid of'.

Upon hearing the accounts of my colleagues, I got the impression that their fieldwork experiences from about ten years ago did not differ so much from my own of about 45 years ago. This is somewhat surprising in view of the fact that email, Skype and telephone communication is now possible almost everywhere, which prevents the radical cut-off from home; something that can exacerbate the negative aspects of fieldwork such as loneliness and isolation, but that also seems so crucial for delving into another world.

Afterthoughts

Four thoughts cross my mind when I try to weigh the 'density' of this strong sense of freedom of both 45 and ten years ago. The first is about gender. The long list of frustrations and other problems of fieldwork collected

by Amy Pollard (2009) that we saw above were predominantly reported by female students. Insecurity, unease about making contact with – male – informants, insomnia, fear of stalkers and physical harassment were the main issues.⁸ Women seem to find themselves in a much more vulnerable position than male fieldworkers.⁹ My conclusion should probably be that I was lucky being male, at least during my fieldwork. Fieldwork reports by my own female students who did research in Ghana confirm this. They were far less enthusiastic than me about the openness of people and about making friends. Male friends were problematic as there was always the risk of unwelcome expectations, but female friends or trusted informants were also difficult to find. When I asked one of my students why she thought this was the case, she replied that it seemed as if the Ghanaian girls and women were jealous of her: 'Why should you come here to ask me questions, while I have no chance to do a similar thing in your country?' Francine's comments above, from Ghana, confirm this interpretation.

Other possible explanations for the different experiences are the topics and areas that anthropology students choose nowadays. They want to be relevant. They write about domestic violence, war, child soldiers, prisoners, refugees, AIDS patients and current issues in the public debate such as transgenderism, euthanasia, dementia and the crisis in care giving. Their interest in drama, violence, injustice and exclusion brings them into awkward and dangerous situations that are hard to handle. I – with many of my contemporaries – was rather fascinated by the secrets of everyday life, which I believed then – and still to today – to be the core of culture. This focus took me to locations where I could

forge more relaxed relations with those around me. Yet this relaxed everyday life was still full of drama and excitement (Van der Geest 2016).

The third and fourth afterthought are related. Have I *romanticised* my first fieldwork adventure, as we also tend to romanticise other first loves? And have I *rationalised* the quality of my research and whitewashed my frustrations and mistakes? Maybe. Yet the emotion of an exceptional new kind of freedom remains an unforgettable memory, which I share with the four colleagues who reflected on my and their own fieldwork.

Finally, Sartre's forewarning that we are condemned to be free has remained with me throughout the writing of this essay. How serious must we take this while reflecting on fieldwork and freedom? My anthropological 'persona' struggles with his abstract philosophical statement. Does the philosopher have enough cultural sensitivity at his disposal to relativise his dramatic adage? Should his phenomenology not make him more attentive toward the everyday human experience of acting without thinking? Human habitus is the great undoer of the 'curse' of always taking decisions. Culture is our second nature and helps us to take thousands of decisions each day without thinking, without knowing even. It is this embodied automaton that takes over the everyday drabness of practicing freedom.

By going on fieldwork, we disturb this routine and recover an awareness of our freedom. Fieldwork calls us awake.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks go first of all to those who became the 'substance' of my freedom during fieldwork in Ghana; to Francine van den Borne, Miranda van Reeuwijk, Daniël Reijer and Janneke Verheijen who commented on the essay and shared their experiences with me; and to Zoe Goldstein who polished the text.

Notes

- 1 With apologies to those who prefer a gender-neutral text, I will use the masculine pronouns, mostly for stylistic reasons. Gender-neutrality often forces one into wooden sentences that are worse than the sin of 'masculism'. I envy the speakers of Twi and many other languages who don't have to bother about gender distinction.
- 2 Since, material anthropology and the 'social life of things' have taught me to have a more nuanced perspective on things than this essentialist statement at the heart of phenomenology, though the central idea of the existentialist philosophers still stands.
- 3 Excluding brief visits to the field in Arizona (USA), Mexico and East Africa.
- 4 Srinivas launched the concepts of 'twice and thrice born' in a guest lecture at the University of Chicago in 1974. There is no written reference to it, but the terms have been used frequently by others, one of whom must have been present at that lecture. Victor Turner (1978: xiii) was – as far as I know – the first to refer to Srinivas' concepts.

- 5 *Dhəhəw te se abɔfra* [A stranger is like a child]; *Dhəhəw ani akese-akese, nanso ɔmfa nhunu kuro mu asem* [The stranger's eyes are very big, but he still cannot understand the town's affairs]; *Dhəhəw nto mmra* [A stranger does not break laws].
- 6 *Awaree te se 'yenkɔ nante'*.
- 7 But, she added: 'When you come home in your own context, others judge you for having become less judgemental and call you arrogant'.
- 8 The following quotes from Pollard (2009) are but a few of the numerous complaints made by women about the situations they experienced during fieldwork:
 'When she reached the field, Kevser was told it was not safe to walk outside, or even to stay in a hotel room which was on the ground floor. "I was petrified... so unhappy".
 'Maria sought solitude in other ways too, living alone and separating herself from certain relationships in the field. "I remember that I did turn to isolation and I did it very deliberately. It carried on for an entire year". She described this period as the loneliest she had ever been'.
 'Kevser slept badly because she was not confident that her house was secure'.
 'She described how she knew she needed to go home, but did not trust anyone to help her get there: "In the end, my dad had to fly out to take me home".
 'Physical safety was a particular issue for female research students. Several described how they felt very visible, and were vulnerable in public no matter how much they covered up their bodies'.
- 9 Strangely enough, Pollard hardly says a word about the gender aspects of her findings, which seem so evident in her article. I had to do some close reading and text analysis to be absolutely certain about the role of gender identity. She does not even mention how many male and how many female students she interviewed. I discovered that throughout the article only two

male students are mentioned by (fictitious) name versus ten female students. The term 'she' occurs 164 times while 'he' occurs only 37 times (moreover, in about half of the latter cases, 'he' refers to a supervisor and not to a student).

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