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RESEARCH AS ACCOMPANIMENT: REFLECTIONS ON OBJECTIVITY, ETHICS, AND EMOTIONS

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I am a Salvadoran immigrant scholar in the United States. This means that I have lived and built a research career in the country whose settler-colonial government funded the civil war and benefited from the conditions that displaced my family from our birthplace. Consequently and by design, I am always already (perceived as being) out-of-place. As a mestiza from a working-class background, I represent a notably small demographic in U.S. academia, one whose ability to properly conduct research and to produce insightful work is often in question. For example, when I asked a professor for a letter of recommendation for a travel grant to conduct graduate research in El Salvador, he responded, "make sure you're not just going to hang out with family." And when as a research assistant I submitted multiple interview summaries to the Principal Investigator of the project, her response was genuine shock each time at my ability to conduct incisive interviews and to write clearly and perceptively. She did not expect someone who looked like me to excel at these skills, even though I was close to completing a PhD at the time. Such reminders of my positionality and of the associated assumptions others placed on me have punctuated my journey and continue to contextualize my work in the field of law and society.

It is not surprising that there are few others who share aspects of my social location who are also now knowledge producers in academia. As sociologist Steven Osuna notes,

> Through a racialized, gendered, and especially class-specific project, academic institutions have privatized and restricted knowledge production to elites and those from the upper classes. Any knowledge production by the lower orders of society has been interpreted as illegitimate, backward, or nonscientific, thereby allowing the knowledge produced through academic institutions by intellectuals to mask power relations through claims of objectivity and positivism. (Osuna 2017: 27-28)

Indeed, my professor and the principal investigator who hired me as a research assistant in graduate school saw me as inherently less capable than others. In their eyes, my social location placed

[1] Professor in Chicana/o and Central American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Email: abrego@ucla.edu. I wish to thank the generous and thoughtful participants of the workshop, "Out of Place: Power, Person, and Difference in Socio-Legal Research" organized by Lynnette Chua and Mark Massoud. The conversations were generative and gave me freedom to reflect deeply on my trajectory in academia. I am also grateful for Carlos Colorado's consistent support.

me outside of who may be trusted to uphold the revered values of objectivity, positivism, and even basic competence as a scholar. These professors reminded me that I was out-of-place in a PhD program.

Much of the underpinning of methodological training in sociology communicated similar rejection. The lessons imparted through patterns in funding, publication, awards, and assigned readings suggested that quantitative approaches were most valued because they were perceived as systematic, replicable, and scientific. On the other end of that spectrum of validity, scholars of color doing qualitative work—especially when invested in social justice—were deemed unable to capture "the truth" because we were too close to our research subjects, always already too "biased" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Never mind that "outsider" scholars have a history of egregiously biased misrepresentations of communities of color (Blauner and Wellman 1973).

The "insider" versus "outsider" debates notwithstanding, Qualitative Methodology curriculum suggested an agreement that good qualitative research involved a start and end date, with the goal of entering and exiting "the field" in ways that minimized emotional entanglements. What happens when you live or have lived in "the field" and your goals expand beyond "objective" analysis for the sake of contributing to academic knowledge production? In this chapter, I reflect on how, given my social location, I have navigated these expectations across the arc of the research process in multiple studies. It is a methodological appendix of sorts that scrutinizes two decades of qualitative work in the intersecting fields of international migration and law and society.

Accompaniment in Academia

Now that I teach in a department of Chicana/o and Central American Studies, I rarely deal with the raced and classed forms of rejection common in sociology or law and society spaces. Visits to other departments and campuses, however, remind me of how social location can vastly inform one's approach to research. I enjoy giving talks to different audiences. I am energized by the intellectual engagement that opens possibilities for new directions in my analysis. But sometimes these interactions are difficult. At a recent visit to an elite private U.S. university, for example, a few white male graduate students training in qualitative social science research joined some faculty and me for dinner. In the midst of savoring the delightful organic food, I noticed myself starting to feel physically ill in reaction to some of the students' commentary. They said things like: qualitative work is great because you can hear the gruesome stories about violence in migrants' lives, but you have the reprieve of theory to make sense of what they've

gone through and distance yourself through it. One of them said that writing was the best part of being a scholar because it removes him from the violence and permits him to organize and intellectualize it.

I felt ill because I know my own experience and that of many U.S. scholars of color. We cannot fully distance ourselves from the structures that produce violence; intellectualizing is not the end goal. Instead, we are deeply committed to people's wellbeing just as much as, and often more than, to the advancement of a field. We are aiming to be in accompaniment. As Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz explain when they draw from the ideals and practices of Salvadoran martyr, Oscar A. Romero, accompaniment is "a disposition, a sensibility, and a pattern of behavior. It is a commitment based on a cultivated capacity for making connections with others, identifying with them, and helping them" (2019: 23). For Romero,

> accompaniment meant making the needs of the most powerless and most oppressed—the people most likely to be left out—into *everyone's* first priority. It entailed asking questions before acting, taking inventory of multiple forms of social exclusion, and learning how to be people who do not succumb to the dominant norms of an acquisitive, aggressive, and antagonistic world. (Tomlinson and Lipsitz 2019: 25)

Scholars who are members of the majority racial group, who benefit from patriarchy and white supremacy, have the privilege of intellectualizing and distancing, and are more likely to be endorsed as appropriately objective and rigorous (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Indeed, academia exists in and often reproduces the "acquisitive, aggressive, and antagonistic world." Scholars who choose to counter the rules of objectivity and reinvent expectations of rigor (Hale 2008), are invested as co-creators of a process of transformation. This carries immense responsibility and can make writing feel paralyzing (Negrón-Gonzales 2014).

My practices of accompaniment stand in opposition to settler-colonial standards of objectivity (Morgensen 2012), but my work is rigorous in ways that matter beyond academic norms. This becomes evident to others through the emotional nature of the work. My practices of accompaniment give me access to people's lives in ways that can evoke deep emotions from study participants, readers, and audience members.

At my talks, people often ask me how I deal with the painful stories I document. Depending on who is asking, this question and ensuing conversations can signal different concerns. In my experience, white students are trying to make sense of how to follow the prescribed rules of "objectivity" while aiming to unearth deep insights about human experiences. Similar questions from working-class students of color, however, suggest a desire to understand how one maintains emotional well-being

when the research so persistently reveals the kind of suffering that hits close to home. In each of these instances, though based on different priorities, audiences read me as being out-of-place in academia: one for not being objective enough; the other for being too close to the institution's demands to do good work on behalf of the community. After two decades of research, I have come to understand that it is precisely my positionality as an out-of-place scholar that permits me to negotiate all such expectations to produce socio-legal work that is simultaneously humanizing and rigorous.

This chapter is about how the framework of accompaniment allows me to process the emotions of conducting law and society research. I find that by centering the emotional wellbeing of study participants and readers from similar communities, research becomes a way to foster community because it allows people to engage in emotional ties with one another. I argue that a researcher's positionality—in my case as a racially marginalized woman with working-class sensibilities—also entails an *emotional* positioning and that emotions, rather than their denial through an expectation of "objectivity," produces more honest and ethical research. Notably, my commitment to accompaniment blurs the presumed division between researcher and study participants.[2]

Research Tools for Accompaniment

> The late poet-warrior, Audre Lorde, warned that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. As with any theoretical premise, Lorde's caveat is useful only if the elements – whose paring away enables its elegance and urgency – are added back, so that the general truth of the abstraction has concrete meaning for day-to-day life. The issue is not whether the master uses, or endorses the use of, some tool or another. Rather, who controls the conditions and the ends to which any tools are wielded? … The house must be dismantled so that we can recycle the materials to institutions of our own design, usable by all to produce new and liberating work. (Gilmore 1993: 70)

I have a PhD in sociology. There is no question that I was trained to use "the master's tools." Most of my research projects to date have drawn on in-depth interviews with immigrants in various legal statuses in the United States. Analyzing their words and using a comparative strategy to underscore common narratives by legal status, I aim to capture how US foreign and immigration policies centrally shape the everyday lives of migrants. It is my social location guided by goals of accompaniment that permit me

[2] I wish to thank Karina Alma and Floridalma Boj Lopez for encouraging me to make these points more explicitly.

to use “the master’s tools” to my own ends, in “new and liberating” directions. I conduct research in a notably anti-immigrant political and discursive context in which immigration policies are often violently enforced (Menjívar and Abrego 2012). As a member of one of the racial groups that is most explicitly targeted by such immigration policies in the United States, I am firmly aware of the intimate ways in which enforcement spreads fear and uncertainty in immigrant communities. Interviews allow me to learn directly from those who are targeted, whose voices and experiences are too often excluded or misrepresented in public discourse. From the conception of a project, to the recruitment of participants, to the interactions during each interview, and through the dialectical process of analysis—all aspects and stages of my work are deeply informed by my social location and goals of accompaniment.

I am both the thoroughly trained scholar who designs studies methodically to leverage the analytical power of comparative research and I am the Salvadoran immigrant whose relatives and close friends suffer daily the complex consequences of the very systems that I analyze. My out-of-place status as a socio-legal scholar allows me to prioritize my own and my research participants’ humanity above a questionable expectation for objectivity in the research process. On the other hand, my doctoral training and membership in academia have moved me from a working-class upbringing to a solidly middle class context, thereby at times turning me into an out-of-place Salvadoran immigrant with enough awareness about various realities to effectively contextualize my work and make it accessible to multiple audiences. To conduct thorough and humane law and society research (indeed, to even consider these equal priorities), I perform academic accompaniment in the tradition of Oscar A. Romero. For every project, therefore, I go through a layered process; every stage of research and analysis requires different strategies to help me ethically manage emotions and information while capturing what is at stake for immigrant communities.

Conceptualizing a Project

Because of who I am, because I migrated as an undocumented child to the United States, because my family was forced to flee a war that was being funded and promoted by the US government to uphold a capitalist system that undermines the well-being of the majority of Salvadorans in El Salvador and abroad (Abrego and Villalpando Forthcoming), I seek out research projects that help me understand how humans suffer, adapt, and live in the face of systemic, often legally-condoned injustice. I remember how it felt as a child to interact with immigration authorities: we had to wake up before dawn, make our way through city streets and highways to get downtown and stand in

line outside of the federal building before it opened, without any guarantee that we would be seen that day. If we were lucky, the line of people waiting was not yet too long and we were able to get a number to be seen. Inside, we were sent through barren halls and into a waiting room that would soon be filled with other anxious people. We all sat quietly on uncomfortable chairs. My family walked in together when called into small offices. Sometimes we were treated kindly, or at least neutrally, and we were relieved. Often, we were treated poorly. Though it must have been difficult for my parents to remain quiet in the face of such disrespect, we did not question anything because our fates were in the hands of the people who asked my parents prodding questions. I vividly recall that even after we got legal permanent resident status, any time we crossed the border and returned to the United States, my parents were nervous at the point of inspection. The authorities there also had the right to talk to us as they wished, to presume the worst of us.

This knowledge is embodied and powerfully lodged inside of me. In hindsight, it is not surprising that I seek out research projects that center the law as a powerful site of production of violence. I initially entered into the practice of empirical research, however, without an awareness of how my lived experiences were shaping my academic interests. Instead, like most social scientists, I aimed to begin the research process guided by a carefully constructed research question. While I often revisit and revise my research question multiple times throughout the duration of a project, even after the conclusion of the analysis, I also believe that a solid research question best helps to guide research. I arrive at this research question through a dialectical process that takes into account the questions raised in the literature on immigration and places them in the context of what I witness to be pressing issues in the immigrant community—in the day-to-day lives of the people who are targeted by changing laws and dominant discursive contexts.

With a foot in academia and another in working-class immigrant communities, being out-of-place generates research questions that demand nuanced answers. It is not enough to generate theory for the sake of theory; it is necessary to also produce knowledge that reflects immigrant realities and informs immigrant rights movements. Conceptualizing a project as accompaniment, therefore, requires some understanding of the state of the academic field(s) of interest and a deep familiarity with the processes, practices, and emotions of the people and communities in question.

It has been a long process of learning and unlearning. In 2001, when I embarked on my first empirical project, I was taking graduate courses on immigration. The emphasis in much of that literature was on the concept of assimilation—the idea that after a

generation or more, the immigrant stock (immigrants, their children, and grandchildren) would look statistically just like the average middle-class white population (Gordon 1964; Park 1950). Implicitly, immigrant "success" was understood in that literature as approximation to whiteness. Measuring assimilation involved looking closely at national-origin and racial groups' average levels of educational attainment; at what percentage of each group were completing college; their average wages; and, most problematic in my mind, how many were intermarrying with whites (Osuji 2019). Implicit in this approach was the idea that "successful" immigrants were good enough to be accepted into white families. Most research questions derived solely from that literature were about measuring groups' socioeconomic attainment and whites' acceptance of them.

At the same time as I was reading that literature, I was spending time with high school youth at a community-based organization. What began as a class requirement to conduct an ethnography ended up becoming an important extra-curricular activity for me. Immigrant students taking a video-making class taught me about the challenges they faced in their poorly-resourced schools and, in some cases, as they came to learn that they were undocumented. Toward the end of that academic year—my first year in graduate school—another youth organization started meeting in the same space as the video-making class and some of the youth in the first class joined the group. Mostly undocumented, they were organizing to try to influence public policies in the state of California. I attended all the meetings, gave rides to some of the participants, and joined them as a chaperone on a bus trip to the state capitol over 350 miles away. Through my research, I developed short bios of some of the students that activists then used on legislative visits to lobby for the passage of Assembly Bill 540, a policy that would make it possible for them to afford college in California. Having gotten to know them, I became invested in their political fight, even as I needed to conduct research for my Master's thesis.

The immigration literature suggested that "success" for these migrants would be to attend college, but it did not account for the fact that state and federal policies impeded college attendance for undocumented youth. Still new to the practice of empirical research and academic writing, I devised a research question that safely (within the master's house) centered the notions that were prominent in immigrant assimilation literature. I tried to answer the research question: how do undocumented children of immigrants experience assimilation? I designed a study that used interviews to compare the migration, schooling, and neighborhood experiences, as well as the future plans of children of immigrants in three legal categories: U.S. citizen, legal permanent resident, and undocumented. The comparative strategy allowed me to, on the one hand, underscore their many

shared experiences as working class and poor Latino immigrants up until high school graduation, and on the other hand, reveal how starkly divergent were their future plans and college prospects due to legal status (Abrego 2006). My out-of-place status, as a researcher steeped in immigrant communities allowed me to recognize the missing factor of legal status, and later to develop a focus on the legal, social, and political construction of "illegality" that effectively impedes what migration scholars were counting as "success."

Recruiting Study Participants

Being an out-of-place scholar and an immigrant from a working-class background committed to accompaniment also inform how I approach the people who participate in my research. Unlike traditional researchers who are taught that their research projects (and career) take precedence over the desires of "human subjects" (for a similar observation, see González-López 2010), I understand my work as needing to center the well-being of participants (González-López 2011; Swauger 2009). I grew up in a poor neighborhood where outsiders sometimes came to conduct research without explaining to us what they were doing. Too young to understand who was behind such projects, I do remember feeling uncomfortable with their assumptions about my community. In hindsight, I wonder if those researchers and outsiders thought they were improving our neighborhoods, maybe even empowering us. If they did, they were mistaken. Their actions and unwillingness to include us in the process impeded any sense of ownership or empowerment for us.

These experiences contextualize how I understand my responsibilities as a researcher. I do not feel comfortable entering a project presuming that the benefits to my career and to the vague notion of a socio-legal scholarship field are sufficient to override the discomforts or potential harms that my research could bring to the individual people who participate.[3] I am aware of the intricate ways that laws shape people's intimate and complex lives and I do not want to open up difficult conversations without offering something in return.

When I was in graduate school, without children or work responsibilities, I was able to spend ample time getting to know people and assisting in their various efforts before requesting interviews. In my first empirical project, for example, I spent countless hours not only attending meetings and providing rides, but I also helped edit students' college application essays and wrote letters to politicians to share findings from my work along

[3] There are important, broader discussions about ethics in social science research that are beyond the scope of this chapter, but merit close attention, as well (Fisher and Anushko 2008).

with a request for policy changes to benefit the youth I was writing about. I did much of the same for my second research project. Still involved in the immigrant rights movement, I began to see the changes in how they presented themselves and how they understood their place in U.S. society after a change in law granted them greater access to higher education. I was conscientious in my decision not to request interviews with them until after I had helped a few of them navigate higher education, serving as an unofficial mentor and making myself available whenever they sought me out.

To date, I continue to accompany the immigrant rights community. With new responsibilities, however, I have only managed to stay in touch through social media with many of the people who participated in my first two projects. Time constraints no longer allow me to be present to the same degree or in the same ways as when I was a graduate student. My approach now includes applying for sufficient funds to provide monetary compensation to people who are willing to share their stories with me. For a recent project, for example, I was able to secure enough funding to pay each study participant US$50 per interview (Abrego 2018b). While traditional researchers sometimes question the ethics of providing monetary incentives (Fisher and Anushko 2008), I understand people's time, stories, and energy to be valuable and because most of the people I interview are also exploited workers, I know that this sum will minimally help offset financial need. As an out-of-place scholar, I view these payments as the least I can do to thank them for sharing their stories and knowledge. I get to learn directly from them—the experts of their own experiences.

Conducting Interviews

Once people have agreed to participate in an interview with me, the next part of the process is to approach our interaction mindfully (González-López 2011). This practice is something I learned while conducting interviews and not through my formal academic training. In 2001, when I was conducting my first study, I had a striking moment that underscored the different sets of rules and expectations in research. I had just completed my first year in graduate school and after spending several months volunteering as a teaching assistant in a video-making class, I asked the students if I could interview them for my Master's thesis.

The youth in the class—all of whom lived in low-income neighborhoods and attended poorly-resourced schools—knew me well by then and happily agreed to participate. During the interviews, all of the students expressed an understanding of their family's migration as central to their lives; shared that they had witnessed violence in their communities; and noted a lack of resources and great need in their schools. Expecting that there

would be many very clear distinctions in their experiences by legal status, I was starting to worry that the differences were not evident in their narratives. Finally, during one interview, when sharing his hopes for the future, an undocumented student began to cry. Internally, my first response was a sense of relief and even excitement because his emotions would help confirm my hypothesis.

My mind raced thinking about how I could leverage this interview and his tears to strengthen my findings. This would allow me to make a clear connection in my thesis between the youth's experiences and the legal categories that I was arguing mattered centrally in the process of immigrant integration. The student went on to talk about how disoriented he felt to have recently learned of his undocumented status as a 16-year-old. He had difficulty focusing in school and wondered how life would be in the future. Would he be able to achieve any of the goals he had envisioned for himself? My next emotion was shame. Excitement was not an acceptable feeling in the face of a scared teenager's tears. How could I prioritize my thesis over this young man's well-being? Why did I, even for a second, think that my academic goals superseded the emotional well-being of the people living through the challenges I was studying?

To this day, I am ashamed of my one-time excitement in the face of another person's pain. I vowed to myself that I would not ever allow academia's rules and expectations to devalue study participants' and my own humanity. To that end, I work hard to create a comfortable conversational atmosphere in every interview. An interview is, after all, just a specific kind of human interaction and in any conversation, human beings develop a relationship, even a very brief one, that determines how we feel and how we respond to one another.

Providing accompaniment as an out-of-place scholar requires a presence of mind to understand even in indirect language the law's consequences in people's lives, even when they do not actually name the law as the culprit of their problems. For example, even though few children of migrants I interviewed in El Salvador were familiar with the term for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), they described the sadness that invaded them when they knew that their parents had work permits (and presumably a stable legal status), but had not returned. They expected parents to demonstrate their love by visiting them, but these expectations were based on incorrect understandings of the law. Having lived experiences in communities with many undocumented and temporarily protected immigrants, I was able to deduce that legal status was, once again, the culprit of their families' separation.

Many of these conversations and realizations are painful for study participants to revisit. Therefore, during interviews, I also

always ensure inconsolable interviewees that we can stop the conversation whenever they want. We can take a break or end the interview if talking is too difficult. I sometimes cry with them. Despite expectations of "objectivity" and replicability (that would require me to ask questions in the exact same way of every single study participant), I do not hold back. If I feel like reaching out and lightly touching their arm to console them, I do so. Sometimes, I can sense that my crying will only make the situation more difficult, either because they are trying to be strong or because it will make them more emotional, so instead I offer comforting words or gestures. Here, it is important not to make the situation about me. The interviewee should not be expected to do the emotional labor of consoling the researcher.

I have worried about harming study participants too much in the process of trying to tell a more holistic analytical story about their lives while offering them little in the way of concrete and immediate rewards for their time, stories, and vulnerability. Most often, however, people have told me after the interview that it felt good to share and release some of the pain they carry. They are grateful for the opportunity to be heard with compassion. This alleviates my fear that interviews may be too emotionally extractive and after multiple studies, I recognize that the rewards may not ever be directly tied to those who initially shared their words with me, but that there can be a more collective sense of healing and justice for those who later read the words and feel identified, even empowered, by the stories.

Given the intimacy of interviews, however, this is not always the most appropriate method to conduct socio-legal research on the consequences of US foreign and migration policies. Since 2014 when Central American unaccompanied youth were arriving to the United States and being detained inhumanely in large numbers, my mind and heart have been with these asylum seekers. As a Salvadoran immigrant, it is deeply painful to see the images of the squalid and lethal conditions so many people, including children, have been confined to over the last several years.

In the midst of ongoing disputed and contemptible changes in immigration policies, these migrants' current conditions are cataclysmic. My socio-legal researcher skills and the interview space that I am able to create, no matter how mindful and humane, will not lessen their dire need. Unable to volunteer at the border for prolonged periods, it feels exploitative to request interviews with asylum-seekers who fled dangerously impossible conditions at home, and who have been desperately waiting for months at the northern Mexican border for a chance to plead their case for asylum in the United States. Realistically, even the offer of a financial incentive feels incomplete, as they continue to be dehumanized and unprotected. Asking them to re-tell their story of

migration while they are in the midst of such devastation feels extractive and abusive—particularly for researchers who descend into the area merely in search of stories to boost their own careers, no matter how "objective" their research design.

My interest in uncovering how the legal system produces suffering and inequalities, has led me to pursue other methods, as well. While I feel ethically compelled not to request interviews from migrants and asylum-seekers in detention or at the border, I also feel morally compelled to keep shining a light on the ongoing injustice. For this purpose, I have turned to researching documents—from the Congressional Research Service, the White House, and multiple presidential administrations—to connect the dots between U.S. imperialism, as evident in foreign policies, and the unlivable conditions in Central America that expel migrants and asylum-seekers (Abrego 2017b; Abrego 2018a; Abrego and Hernández Forthcoming; Abrego and Villalpando Forthcoming). In the future, when I turn to other projects, I hope to return to conducting interviews. As an out of place socio-legal scholar, I find that the greatest insights, both intellectual and practical, come from the very people who live and resist the consequences of the law in their daily lives.

Writing and Analysis

When I do conduct interview-based research, my responsibility as an out-of-place scholar with the goal of accompaniment requires that I continue to work ethically with the information I collect. After each interview, I often take several days to let people's words and experiences sit with me. This was initially not an intentional part of my process; rather, this is something I need. I imagine their experiences and think often about their strength as human beings who persist through systemic obstacles to try to attain a more stable and happy life. I think about the depth of suffering that some people carry and the lack of empathy of mainstream U.S. society. I write notes about their gestures, the moments when they took long pauses, when they cried. I write about the emotions I felt during our conversation. And I save all these details to potentially use at the writing and analysis stage of the project. Even when they do not make it into the final draft of a manuscript, those details help me humanize study participants and their stories, and they humanize me while adding depth to my analysis.

When the interviews are done, I either transcribe the recordings myself or pay to have them transcribed. At the stage of reading the transcripts to begin the coding process, I once again feel and manage my emotions to complete the project. On many occasions, I have cried. Reading the transcripts, even after being present during the interview, reveals more details that I missed the first time around. The crying, in these instances, lets me know that

I am human and that I see their full humanity; that I am not only driven by a sense of academic purpose. I try to be patient with myself as I work through my emotions to eventually get to a point of distance, enough to begin to find and name the patterns, to locate the points of most value for both socio-legal scholarship in immigration and for the immigrant rights movement.

I draw on personal experience to understand the insidious, yet invisible, aspects of law's consequences. Without my embodied knowledge, I may not have sufficient perspective to analyze the words of study participants in the proper context. For example, when people tell me that they take responsibility for being undocumented because they traveled to the United States without legal authorization, I emphasize that the settler-colonialist legal system simply does not provide the option of legal migration for large numbers of vulnerable people (Speed 2019). When undocumented and poor youth describe themselves as "lazy" and blame themselves for being unable to go to college, I note the timeline of immigration and education policies that contextualize their development and impede their college attendance (Abrego 2006). When members of a mixed-status family express feeling hurt at the unequal treatment they receive from their parents, I look beyond individual parenting decisions to consider how the law provides unequal resources for children based on their different legal statuses (Abrego 2016). And when women seemingly make decisions that put their lives in danger, I provide the necessary context about legal and economic precarity that limit their options (Abrego 2017a). Being an out-of-place scholar allows me to view multiple angles of a law, its creation, and implementation, while also understanding how it shapes lives in visible and hidden ways, through people's public and more intimate behaviors.

Academic expectations for objectivity unfold in particularly acute ways in law and society research. The study of laws, of a system of rules and regulations, implicitly expects that researchers be particularly "objective" in their study of the legal system. The first time I submitted my work for review to a law and society journal, for example, reviewers requested that I sound more "authoritative" in my writing:

> …the work is compelling and the analysis is strong. A significant detractor, however, is the choice of voice and the continual use of I- me- my. … it robs the author of her/his legitimacy as a scholar making a profound academic and social argument… the author is advised to take her/his spot in academe with conviction. Pronoun and subject choice in this case moves the manuscript in a more informal, less legitimate sphere, unintentionally turning away potential readers and policy makers…. I found it exceedingly difficult to take the manuscript (and thus the author) seriously due to this choice...

I removed about half of these instances, often making sentences sound a bit awkward to my ears, but more satisfying to the anonymous reviewer. Instead of saying, for example, that "I supplemented the interview data with participant-observation," the published article states, "The interview data is heavily supplemented with participant-observation" (Abrego 2008: 717). The missing words signified that an actual human being conducted the research. It is, therefore, rather telling how an expectation of objectivity makes analysis, at times, more imprecise and always disembodied. In that particular study, none of my conclusions changed, but the reviewer and editor preferred that I not acknowledge my own participation in the research and analysis.

Presentations

I am now a full professor and have had the opportunity to present my work hundreds of times. Given my out-of-place experiences as a socio-legal scholar and my commitment to research of accompaniment, presentations have been, at times, particularly difficult, but also incredibly rewarding. It is in the physical exchange of information, in the conversations that happen directly following a presentation that I am able to witness how different audiences receive my work.

Have you ever cried during a research presentation? This was not a possibility we discussed in methods courses in graduate school. Following an expectation of objectivity meant that we would not become emotionally engaged with the people we interviewed, with their experiences or words. Therefore, I was not prepared when I first practiced my job talk in my own living room and cried. I practiced it repeatedly until I no longer felt like crying because I would never be employed if I cried during a job interview. The practicing helped me become distant enough from the suffering I detailed that I could make my analytic points in a standard presentation style in front of audiences.

But then, it happened again. The first time I presented to an audience of Salvadoran youth, at a college conference organized by the college student organization, USEU (Unión Salvadoreña de Estudiantes Universitarios), I read an excerpt from an interview to them in the original Spanish. The mother I had interviewed in California had not seen her daughter in 12 years. With much anguish, she recalled in detail the day she had parted from her daughter to migrate to the United States to provide financially for her family:

> My heart was boiling with sadness. I would watch my daughter play and say, "God, please give me the strength to leave." … One night I put my daughter to bed and she turned to face the wall. And she always used to hug me, but she didn't that day. I think she could sense my

> departure… and I lay awake crying. And my little girl wakes up and she tells me, "Mami, I want milk (*crying*). I want milk, mami (*crying*)." Those words gave me the strength to [leave]. And I told her, "There is no milk, baby, but I promise I will get you some." And she tells me, "I love you, mami." And I tell her, "I love you too." And she fell asleep until morning…. That morning, the bus was coming. That was the bus that always sounded the horn loudly at the entrance to the town, and it started… I changed my daughter, I put on her pink sandals and I sat her on the table and I told my mother, "Hold her, mom… I leave her in your hands. Love her as if she were your own daughter." (Abrego 2014: 26)

Although I had already been able to present the same material in English, reading and presenting her words in Spanish to a Salvadoran audience filled me with sorrow and I cried. Horrified, I looked around the room only to find that most of the college students in that space were also crying. It became an opportunity to acknowledge the pain of these all-too-common family separations in the Salvadoran migrant experience.

I have not cried during a presentation since that time. Instead, I practice and focus on the goal of sharing the material and my analysis with each audience. When I look around the room, however, there are often a few people shedding tears during my reading of interview excerpts. They remind me of the power of study participants' stories and affirm my commitment to accompaniment.

I have also been fortunate to hear directly from audience members about how they relate to my work. On one occasion in 2014 at the University of California, Santa Barbara, I presented about how US intervention had played a key role in forcing Salvadorans to flee El Salvador, often leading to family separation. A student I had never met walked up to the front of the room as I was gathering my belongings. The tall, husky young man stood in front of me, wanting to say something, so I looked to engage him. Unlike others who have specific questions about the research, he just asked, "Can I give you a hug?" Surprised, but noting his sincerity, I said, yes. He gave me a warm, tight hug. Afterward, he told me that his father had been deported to El Salvador when he was only a child. He had grown up with anger, dealing with the turmoil of feeling neglected. Hearing me present on how immigration policies play out in other people's lives, he finally understood that his father could not return. It was only in the analytical space created by an out-of-place scholar that it finally made sense to him that his father's absence did not represent a lack of love, but rather that it was produced by the law and its violent implementation.

As an out-of-place scholar in search of accompaniment, I bring these experiences into my work. I think of study participants as potential audience members in my presentations and I write with them in mind as much as I write to move and build upon the scholarship on law and society.

Conclusion

Credibility in the academic community is based on where people were trained, what degrees they attained, and how prestigious their publications. As an out-of-place scholar, these things have had to be in the back of my mind to some extent. Publications are, after all, the currency of academia. I would not have been employed or tenured without the proper academic qualifications—those things that university committees and administrators can quantify. But what I find most fulfilling is the ability to shape the narrative, to highlight the nuances, and underscore the full humanity—my own and study participants' who are members of my communities and potential readers of the work. In 20 years, I have learned that even when the exact people I interviewed do not read the final products (often because IRB does not permit me to keep contact information for study participants), it may be the case that their children, grandchildren, or other relatives in college classes; or people in very similar situations as them will read their words and feel seen and empowered (see, for example, Sasser 2014). Academic research is both more rigorous and meaningful when our work can reach and faithfully capture the expectations of these multiple audiences (Hale 2008).

Academia presupposes a separation between intellectual and embodied pursuits and prioritizes what feminist and scholars of color critique as a false expectation of objectivity (Collins 1989). An uncritical emphasis on objectivity requires that researchers ignore the messiness of life to categorize people and experiences into dependent and independent variables. Good social science research, in this formulation, is "objective" because it will consistently lead to the same findings, regardless of scholars' social location or emotions. As an out-of-place scholar, I know this to be false and I welcome the grainy truths that arise in my embodied research and analysis. I navigate my social location and emotions in detail and at length at every stage of the research to serve the purpose of accompanying the very targets of violent laws.

I am constructed as an out-of-place scholar in U.S. academia because I am a Salvadoran immigrant from a working class background, a subject of U.S. neocolonialism. Using the tools of academia, I make the research process rewarding and more meaningful through accompaniment, by producing work that is more rigorous and verifiable, not only to the academic

community, but—equally importantly—to my own immigrant community, as well. We do this work, we invest time and resources, and we wrestle with the words on the page to weave together stories that will make evident for readers the ways that their own lives, too, are framed within legal structures. When they can see that, and when they can apply that lens to resist in their own lives, out-of-place scholars have effectively used academic tools for justice and liberation.

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