



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Secrecy Vignettes

de Goede, M.

DOI

[10.4324/9780429398186-25](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429398186-25)

Publication date

2020

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Secrecy and Methods in Security Research

License

CC BY-NC-ND

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

de Goede, M. (2020). Secrecy Vignettes. In M. de Goede, E. Bosma, & P. Pallister-Wilkins (Eds.), *Secrecy and Methods in Security Research: A Guide to Qualitative Research* (pp. 261-272). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429398186-25>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, P.O. Box 19185, 1000 GD Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

15

SECRECY VIGNETTES

Marieke de Goede¹

- **Research objective:** This chapter helps researchers who want their academic writing to include explicit accounts of the ways in which they navigated secrecy and its ethical dilemmas in their fieldwork. It proposes that one way of including such accounts is by way of ‘secrecy vignettes’.
- **Research puzzle:** The puzzle the chapter addresses in relation to secrecy and methods is how to analyse the way in which secrecy played out in particular fieldwork sites, and how best to account for such challenging and ethically complex situations of secrecy and confidentiality when writing.

Introduction: writing with secrecy

This chapter discusses the possibility of incorporating secrecy into academic writing and publication by way of ‘secrecy vignettes,’ that show how secrecy was navigated in research practice. Inspired by Rappert’s invitation to develop and deploy creative strategies of “writing *with* secrecy,” I explore the use of vignette-like, reflexive notes from the field (Rappert 2010; also Rappert, this volume). Rappert asks how we may “attend to the absent” in research accounts, in particular where it concerns research relating to classified sites or practices (2010: 574). His work resists the common injunction to deal with secrecy through *exposure* or *disclosure*. This is not just because exposure possibly entails ethical challenges or confidentiality breaches by the researcher, but also because the notion of ‘revealing secrets’ entails a particular approach to secrecy, which casts the researcher in a problematic role as the one with the capacity to reveal (also Walters and Luscombe, this volume).

In contrast, Rappert encourages a lateral approach to confidential knowledge, that seeks to give the secret *a place* in the research practice or writing. If, as Graham Jones points out, “absolute transparency in social relations is impossible,” then how can we attend to the secret in a way that moves beyond the sensationalist economy

of exposure or disclosure (2014: 61)? Sometimes, it is possible to give the secret literally a place in the text, as in Rappert's experimentations with blacked-out text in his academic writing on nuclear weaponry (see also Chapter 7). More broadly, 'writing with secrecy' attends to the complex and processual nature of secrecy. If secrecy is ad-hoc and controversy driven – as many of the chapters in this book suggest – then rendering some of these processes explicit through vignettes or excerpts could be a promising way to reflect on how they played into the research process.

In this contribution, I explore vignettes as a way to give secrecy a place in academic writing. Vignettes offer a specific register or genre to convey "academic voice," beyond the limited repertoire of academic writing (Dauphinee 2010: 805). They give access to "something intimate," while enabling us "to draw broader lessons" (Michael 2012: 28), and this makes them suitable for rendering explicit ethical dilemmas and ongoing fieldwork negotiations.

Furthermore, this writing form can give academic voice to the complex entanglements between researcher and researched that participant–observation produces. As the vignettes in this chapter illustrate, practice-based research into security communities fosters complex relations between researchers and the communities of practice that they study (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot 2015). This has implications for critical voice and the scope for engaged advocacy. The purpose of the chapter is not to fully tease out these implications and dilemmas (see the contributions of Stavrianakis and Grassiani, this volume). However, I suggest that vignettes offer one productive way of drawing out these entanglements, allowing for what Wanda Pillow (2003: 192) calls a "reflexivity of discomfort." As textual forms, vignettes can be placed in advance of or alongside more conventional social scientific prose, for example as a narrative introductory examples or as a textbox (such as the ones used throughout this book). In this manner, they offer an opportunity to include auto-ethnographic fieldwork reflections into a published piece, without having necessarily to embrace auto-ethnography as the primary genre for a written piece.

Vignettes

Vignettes are understood as short narrative stories or examples that function as a "window through which the reader can view some of the pleasure and pain" of research in practice (Humphreys 2005: 842).² They are commonly but not exclusively deployed in ethnographic writing, and may comprise a number of elements. First, vignettes exemplify the mundane, everyday, lived reality of research practice. They "afford the possibility of conveying something that we would not otherwise have been able to hear" (Dauphinee 2010: 806; Ackerly, Stern and True 2010). In this sense, 'secrecy vignettes' speak to the themes of the book in a double sense. On the one hand, I explore their use as a window onto the practical and ethical dilemmas of studying secretive security practices. On the other hand, vignettes in themselves are a way of rendering visible that which normally remains invisible in research. Vignettes offer a glimpse of the elements of research practice that normally

remain implicit, because they are held to be mundane, preparatory, irrelevant, off-topic or perhaps too boring to include. They can be one way of generating an “active account of ambivalence” that – for Debbie Lisle (2016: 418) – is key to the project of International Political Sociology.

Second, vignettes make space for accounts that divert from the initial research questions or objectives, but that come to absorb much time, effort and thinking as the research is conducted. They speak of elements of the research that are unexpected, unplanned or improvised. They can attest to moments that escape the research questions or that gave cause to rethink the research objectives. As Mike Michael has written about the anecdote: it “captures moments when things go wrong or are out of sorts in one way or another” (2012: 28). What I propose, then, is that vignettes – or auto-ethnographic interludes – are particularly useful to make space for accounts of how secrecy was negotiated and navigated in fieldwork. In the case of my own research project, the main research question: ‘how does the suspicious transaction related to terrorism financing get translated along the chain of reporting and investigation’ (de Goede 2018), was quickly and temporarily displaced by the question ‘how can we create proximity with relevant fieldsites where counter-terrorism financing is being *done*, while retaining our critical distance?’ Third, vignettes allow for attending to reflexivity. They allow the researcher to write “self into the narrative in order to problematize the authorial voice” (Michael 2012: 28). As discussed below, they can render explicit the “constant negotiations” between researchers and researched, and help the author reflect on how their own role, positionality, appearance, gender etc., played into practical research moments (Bueger and Mireanu 2015: 129; Pillow 2003).

However, auto-ethnographic writing (as exemplified in vignettes) potentially also has a number of drawbacks. As Michael Humphries acknowledges, auto-ethnography risks becoming “self-indulgent” (2005: 51). I would add that auto-ethnography poses particular gendered pitfalls. Writing auto-ethnographic vignettes require the author to render herself vulnerable by explicating the confusing, failing, ambivalent or ethically complex moments of fieldwork (Page 2017). This may impact the way in which professional identities are crafted and perceived: less established, non-white and/or female researchers can perhaps less afford to demonstrate such vulnerabilities. Humphries’ compelling account of his unusual career path, for example, allows readers to reflect on class identities, but avoids the question of gender (see Hoijtink, this volume).

Still, I explore the use of secrecy vignettes as particularly promising for a number of reasons. Writing vignettes can be one way of incorporating the mundane, hard work of field research into academic writing. It can give a place to unexpected happenings, personal investments and embodied research practice. It is one promising strategy to write *with* secrecy, because it gives a place to the “excluded presence” of the events that produce data; they allow researchers to “fruitfully remain sensitive to . . . those and that which is excluded in the process of research” (Michael 2012: 33). Vignettes do not entail full auto-ethnographic accounts, but can accompany more formal writing in order to incorporate the excluded, invisible

or unsayable. They can illustrate how to understand secrecy as data, and allow the writer to reflect on the way that access is a process of ongoing negotiation rather than a clear moment of 'getting through the door'. They are one way of rendering visible the ethical stakes and dilemmas of navigating secrecy in security research. Moreover, they can help reflect on the situatedness of knowledge, by showing how information was available to whom, in which moments, places or contexts (Haraway 1988).

The remainder of this short chapter will use vignettes to show how secrecy was experienced, navigated and deliberated in our research into the chain of translation of suspicious financial transactions (Latour 1999; de Goede 2018). This project seeks to 'follow' the suspicious financial transaction from bank to Financial Intelligence Unit to court case, to analyze how suspicion is inscribed, how transactions are rendered mobile and how (in some cases) they gain the capacity to act as evidence before a court of law in criminal prosecutions. The research is funded by the European Research Council (ERC), and the dominant set of questions I was asked during the interview with the funding agency was about possibilities and strategies of access to the secretive world of counter-terrorism financing. Committee members explicitly questioned the very possibility of being able to undertake the participant observation in banks and Financial Intelligence Units that my research proposal foresaw (but see Bosma, this volume). From the very early stages of grant application, to the current state of fieldwork and analysis, then, issues of secrecy have actively shaped our research design, process, practice and team discussions.

Secrecy as practice

Vignette 1: It was not easy to find out when the terrorism financing court case would take place. The indictment had been widely noted in the news, and it was known that the trial would take place at the Central Criminal Court in London (also known as the Old Bailey). However, Old Bailey court listings are not easy to find online, they are posted late and subject to last minute changes. Nevertheless, I made it to the court's public entrance on the day of what was expected to be the first day of trial. After some delay, and waiting before a closed door in a London underpass, I was let into the public gallery, together with family and supporters of the defendants.

The proceedings, at least when the jury was not there, were a lot less formal than I had expected. A number of contentious issues were debated, for example reports of terrorism expertise that had been brought before the court by the defendants. Some key points on the applicable law were discussed. These issues of law were not openly laid out, they were apparently already known to the trial participants. Before these issues were clarified and agreed, the trial was unable to start. The judge encouraged the Crown Prosecution and Defence to get together informally to come to a compromise proposal on these contested issues of law. At times, it was almost as if the judge was thinking out loud. He lost his train of thought. He invited the barristers to 'think along with him,' to help solve the problems and contentious issues before the jury trial started. He said, you don't have to answer right now, 'I just want everyone to think about

these things for themselves'; to 'just have a look at it'. Though attending the court case proved to be a fascinating embodied experience – of waiting, of speaking informally to supporters of the defendants, of watching the trial ritual unfold – I feel that I leave with more questions than I arrived with.

Part of our research focuses on observing criminal trials, as the locus where new (counter-terrorism financing) laws are being given practical significance and reach (e.g. de Goede and de Graaf 2013). However, instead of a privileged site where law is publicly enacted, our fieldwork has found criminal trials to be obfuscated, unpredictable, and difficult to access. The scene in the court room in vignette 1 illustrates how secrecy can function as an (expert) practice, rather than being a clear binary of the visible and invisible. Some of the mystifying and secretive nature of the court proceedings in this case – which indicted parents who had sent money to their young adult son while he was in IS-held territory in Syria – was not directly related to the classification of materials, but arose from the normal course of legal practice.

The rules, documents and speaking turns of a trial are regulated through courtroom rituals. Such rituals strictly structure what takes place in the courtroom, and they give material shape to broad goals like 'justice' (Felman 2002). Much of the legal contestations before the court were left implicit in the spoken proceedings, and were included in documents strictly accessible only to the legal professionals. The courtroom rituals amounted to a profound but not necessarily deliberate obfuscation to outsiders (see Belcher and Martin, this volume). This is what Van Veeren (2018: 197) calls "invisibility as inexpertise": decoding the courtroom proceedings requires specialist knowledge or "visual prosthetics." It is worth pointing out though, that this level of obfuscation affects family and friends of defendants as well as researchers. My position in the public gallery of the Old Bailey and my positionality as a white, professional, woman, in this case allowed me to converse informally with (the white, middle-class) friends of the defendants, who had made an early morning journey to attend the trial but who remained mystified concerning the significance of the proceedings and the future of the trial.

However, in this particular case, additional layers of secrecy were in place. Even if some of the dynamics of obfuscation were due to the specificities of the legal procedure, it matters that it was a terrorism-related trial. Specifically, an UK "anonymity order" applied to this case, which means that case reporting is strictly regulated. The anonymity order means that the people involved in the case cannot publicly speak about or share any of the legal materials. They cannot share details of the offences as charged or of the evidence presented – though, surprisingly, the "names, ages, home addresses and occupations of the accused and witnesses" are exempted from the reporting order.³ The order is in place so that the jury cannot be influenced in advance of the jury trial that is still to take place. The defendants have publicly critiqued the fact that they are unable to talk about the case to "counter lies that have been printed [about their son]" because of the UK contempt of court rules.⁴ When I was able to speak to the defence barrister in this case, she appeared sympathetic to our research project of analyzing how new laws are enacted and given meaning

in this hotly contested field, but extremely reluctant to share information or documents beyond what is strictly available online. The case is ongoing.

To conclude, then, this first vignette speaks to secrecy as a layered, expert *practice*. It shows how, in this particular case, obfuscation arose from expert courtroom rituals, but also from the added layer of a formal, legal, anonymity order. The vignette gives a glimpse of the embodied experience of navigating this layered secrecy, while also attending to the question: *where* does security happen (see also Nyman, this volume)?

Secrecy as process

Vignette 2: In trying to achieve access to a bank's compliance department for ethnographic observation of their counter-terrorism financing practices, we had met contacts at The Bank several times. Sometimes, these meetings were very informal and simply involved a coffee to make acquaintance. Sometimes, they were slightly more formal and took place in meeting rooms at The Bank, whereby we were invited to present our past research findings to bank compliance employees. Employees of a few different departments of The Bank came along to the meetings so that they, too, could ask us some questions as to why we wanted to do this research and how we would protect our research data. Eventually, a meeting with The Bank's legal department was called. This was to be the most formal meeting to date, though it was not entirely clear to us whether this was to be a final hurdle before bank access was decided, or whether it was just one more layer of consent. We diligently prepared for this meeting, in particular by refining and rehearsing the ethical protocol of our research and the way in which we would secure privacy and anonymity of respondents and of client data. We expected privacy to be the main concern and topic of discussion with The Bank's legal department.

Once the meeting got underway, the atmosphere was relaxed and friendly. We presented our research and made the case that it might be of benefit to the bank itself and to wider political debates on compliance issues. We agreed that The Bank's name would be anonymized: after all, we are interested in counter-terrorism financing compliance practices, not the behavior of individual employees or the protocols of one bank in particular. To our surprise, the main concern of The Bank was not strictly the privacy of their clients and their client databases. The legal department's main concern, at least as expressed in this meeting, was with liability. To what extent did The Bank risk being held liable in case our research would find, for example, that a compliance department was understaffed or overworked? How might our findings impact public reporting or public opinion of The Bank, or banking in general? And what scope might our research give clients on the one hand, and regulatory authorities on the other, to sue the bank for potential compliance gaps?

This particular vignette speaks to the “constant negotiations” that take place when researching secretive or challenging fieldsites (Bueger and Mireanu 2015: 129). In our cases, a clear moment of access – a clear passage through the Gate, as we have called this in the book's introduction – was often missing. Instead, there was

an ongoing negotiation, involving multiple coffee meetings, chance encounters at industry conferences, and formal presentations. This process allowed a slow building up of a sense of shared concerns, in which our own positionality as engaged, reputable professionals had to be carefully maintained. However, the outcome of meetings was often unclear; there was a seemingly endless process of deferral and referral even as we were building trust and relevant connections. Indeed, recent literature has pointed out that disclosure itself a process and a practice, rather than a clear moment of transparency. For example, Lisa Gitelman (2014) has shown how the disclosure of the Pentagon Papers (now widely understood to be a key historical example of the revelation of state secrets) was a complex material and juridical process, in which the new Xerox machine played a crucial role (see also Hughes and Garnett, this volume). “Xeroxing was only a first step in what became a lengthy disaggregation and multiplication process,” writes Gitelman in her discussion of Watergate and the materiality of disclosure (2014: 86). Our experiences with what is commonly termed ‘research access’ were that of a slow, embodied, iterative, material and rather confusing process, instead of a clear moment.

In our case, the process of navigating secrecy partly proceeded according to well-known methodological paths, including the crucial role played by professionals who advocated for our research within the organizations that we wanted to study. It is important to emphasize that these key informants, often called ‘gatekeepers’ in the ethnographic literature (Bryman 2012) take risks when they vouch for our trustworthiness inside the organization. In our experience, these key contacts came to act out of a shared concern in the research themes and their potential importance. In this sense, our field contacts engage in a joint risk with us as researchers: they might have hopes about the research outcomes and about generating more transparency for their organization, but this is not guaranteed or specified in advance. A Pauline Mailet (2017: 936–937) and colleagues write of their experience of doing fieldwork in “politically charged arenas”: “We had to remember that authorities can also be vulnerable participants: they are workers whose livelihood and employment status may be jeopardized by disclosures made to researchers.”

Our work with field contacts at The Bank and other organizations in the domain of police and security entails a challenge of *proximity* and *distance* that requires reflection on our research objectives, our role as academic researchers and what this means for our space and capacity for critique (Bueger and Mireanu 2015; Cohn 2006). Other chapters in this book reflect in a more detailed way on these challenges of critique. As Jonathan Luke Austin has put it for example (this volume): “It is perfectly possible to retain a caring and non-judgmental attitude towards those we speak with, while still normatively rejecting and even attempting to combat the particular social system or events that they have been connected with.”

However, our slow, iterative, confusing process of ‘access’ also entailed many surprising twists and turns, as exemplified in our encounter with The Bank’s legal department. The legal department raised a number of concerns – for example, over liability – for which our standard research ethics protocol was quite unprepared. In fact, we found that our prepared ethics documents, with their focus on

anonymization, informed consent and formal agreements, were not the only and main concern of our (highly educated) respondents. Though safeguarding anonymity was a prime shared concern between us and informants, it seemed that some larger organizations in which our researchers conducted participant observation actually avoided the drawing up of tailored documents of informed consent and protection. Highly educated respondents (not necessarily in The Bank) seemed to find that leaving the conditions of proximity in a juridical grey zone to be preferable to seeking written approval and juridical documentation at the highest level of their organization.

To conclude, then, this second vignette speaks to secrecy as an iterative, embodied, and uncertain *process*. It problematizes the notion of access, suggesting that it might be better understood as a dynamic of proximity and distance, rather than a clear moment or position of ‘inside’ or ‘outside’. The vignette gives a glimpse of the multiple formal and informal moments in which we navigated this process, to which our formal ethics protocols were not always well suited (see also Amicelle, Badrudin and Tanner, this volume).

The ethical stakes

Vignette 3: *I was pleased to be able to accept the invitation from the world-leading think-tank to participate in a day-long seminar on current international efforts to fight terrorism financing, and to join the speaker’s dinner in the evening. It promised to be an important moment of engaged participant-observation. The think-tank was renowned for being able to bring together participants from policy worlds, industry, and security authorities for a frank debate. Indeed, discussion at the think-tank was generally thought to be particularly interesting, because of the well-known rule governing non-disclosure of the meeting’s discussions. Still, I experienced a marked difference in the dynamic of the discussion during the day-long seminar – attended by around 100 participants from the financial industry, international organizations, FinTech companies, Non-governmental organizations, and the diplomatic world – and the discussions over dinner, attended by about 25 participants, who mostly worked for the seminar’s main sponsor, but also including a well-respected NGO campaigner and some academics (including myself).*

The dinner was hosted in the think-tank’s first-floor grand library, and to my pleasant surprise, it was very much a working dinner with a tightly chaired common conversation for the duration of three courses. This conversation, as it turned out, entailed some elements that were markedly different from the day’s discussions. First, there appeared to be a strong consensus around the dinner table that targeted public-private information sharing (whereby police share personal information of suspects with the financial industry), was the future of counter-terrorism financing. Second, unlike the daytime discussions, it was acknowledged explicitly and quite forcefully that privacy regulation (in particular the EU General Data Protection Regulation) poses a huge problem to public-private data sharing. Third, I realized that the company sponsor of the seminar (and the host of the dinner) had a specific interest in the sponsorship: the

*company had recently purchased a software program that had incurred some bad press in relation to its counter-terrorism financing practices, and was seeking to connect to the professional field and rebuild its reputation. This left me with a number of ethical questions: what was my role as an academic in helping boost the legitimacy of the day's discussions, which were at least partly sponsored by a company seeking to rebrand? What trade-off was taking place between our research access and the sponsor's quest for legitimacy?*⁵

In this third example, I use vignette-like writing to render explicit the ethical dilemmas and “deliberative moments” of fieldwork practice, and the scope for engaged critique (Montgomerie 2017: 13). As Johnna Montgomerie notes, fieldwork is replete with “choices, trade-offs and judgements,” not all of which can be anticipated and codified in advance (2017: 13). The ethical stakes of field research under conditions of secrecy are quite specific, as detailed in the chapters in part 3 of this book. The “openly ambiguous textual form” of the vignette or anecdote can offer a place to reflect on these choices and judgements, without necessarily providing definitive answers (Michael 2012: 27).

Sharing in secrets can create affective responses in researchers, from “guilty excitement” to “intense paranoia about the consequences of . . . disclosing” (Jones 2014: 61). However, with research commonly being focused on accessing information, it is easily forgotten that perhaps one does not always *want* to know secrets (as also pointed out by Chappuis and Krause, this volume). Becoming initiated into secretive or closed off materials produces a shared responsibility. Knowing a secret creates a bond, and renders the researcher – even if in a limited way – co-responsible for keeping or disclosing the material. In extreme cases, this can place researchers in a moral dilemma. In this case, the company sponsorship of the seminar was, of course, not strictly a secret: their logos had been prominently displayed throughout the day, and sponsorship for these types of professional events is not unusual. However, the extent of the company's involvement in the day, and their specific interest after acquiring the controversial software program, only really became clear to me through the dinner discussions. Other elements of the dinner conversation, such as the identification of privacy as a problem to the industry, were similarly revealing. Being let in on these ‘secrets’ was both revealing for understanding the dynamics of the professional field, but also gave me an uneasy co-responsibility.⁶ The challenge is how to incorporate such research findings into published work in a way that respects the confidentiality of the dinner setting while being transparent about research methods.

This third vignette shows my uneasy positioning at the inside–outside of the international community of practice of counter–terrorism financing. My years of research into this field has created a critical dialogue with practitioners. I welcome the occasional invitations to participate in professional seminars, and regard them to be important fieldwork moments in this generally secretive domain. At the same time, I am weary that my university affiliation and professional standing can provide legitimacy to a contested field. My own sense is that ‘uneasiness’ is a durable

and productive position in such encounters. For Pillow (2003: 92) for example, a “reflexivity of discomfort” entails a self-reflexive methodological account that does not seek to erase tension into a smooth narrative, but that, instead holds on to such tensions, or includes them as “confounding disruptions.” The vignette can offer a creative, disruptive, narrative form that departs from traditional academic voice, but that is suitable to rendering such uneasiness and its ethical stakes explicit.

Conclusion

This chapter has experimented with vignettes as creative writing strategies that can give secretcies a place in academic writing. My proposal is that researchers in critical security studies, International Political Sociology, and beyond, could more actively use such creative writing strategies to create transparency and reflexivity concerning their fieldwork approaches in secretive settings. Rather than erasing the secretive and the complex challenges of access from research output, I have sought to express the secrecy dilemmas and deliberations that have absorbed much time and energy in our own research project. These secrecy vignettes move beyond common injunctions to disclose or reveal, but instead incorporate confidentiality and its ethical stakes explicitly in academic writing. All vignettes in this chapter are based on ongoing, team-based fieldwork, whereby it is our experience that undertaking joint fieldwork can help strengthen the position of the researcher and create a productive sounding board for the ethical dilemmas at play.

The specific form of the vignette is that it is both open-ended and selective. Vignettes necessarily privilege certain moments over others. Their selection and narration should be based on fieldwork notes, but are at least partly in the realm of an intuitive assessment of key fieldwork moments or events. Vignettes offer one form of “vulnerable writing” (Page 2017), but mostly refrain from showing the depth of despair that can sometimes accompany fieldwork. Vignettes need not necessarily present smooth narratives or clear lessons: their ambiguous form lends itself to exploring tensions and contradiction in fieldwork, and producing a ‘reflexivity of discomfort’. Vignettes provide only snippets of complex and continuing processes of fieldwork; they are open-ended in the sense that they raise ethical questions without seeking to fully close them down.

In addition to giving a place to secrecy, the vignettes also help to reflect on the nature and shape of secrecy, and how it played into our research project. Specifically, these vignettes show how we encountered secrecy as a practice and a process, rather than purely a barrier to be overcome. Navigating secretcies in our case entailed a material and embodied process. We experienced secrecy as layered, requiring repeated investments, meetings and dialogues, and multiple iterations of our research questions and objectives. Many of these encounters did not easily match formal methodological rules of access and ethics protocols as established in the literature. Auto-ethnographic writing in the forms of vignettes, anecdotes or text boxes are one way of giving a place to these experiences, while countering the invisibilities that are normally accorded to embodied fieldwork.

Suggestions for further reading

- Christian Bueger and Manuel Mireanu (2015) 'Proximity,' in Claudia Aradau, Jef Huysmans, Andrew Neal and Nadine Voelkner (eds) *Critical Security Methods*. London: Routledge, pp. 118–141.
- Carol Cohn (2006) 'Motives and methods: Using multi-sited ethnography to study US security discourses,' in Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern and Jacqui True (eds) *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 91–107.
- Elizabeth Dauphinee (2010) 'The ethics of autoethnography,' *Review of International Studies* 36(3):799–818.
- Michael Humphreys (2005) 'Getting personal: Reflexivity and autoethnographic vignettes,' *Qualitative Inquiry* 11: 840–860.

Notes

- 1 Tasniem Anwar, Esmé Bosma, Rocco Bellanova, Pieter Lagerwaard, Polly Pallister-Wilkins and Natalie Welfens are both common travellers during the fieldwork moments expressed in these vignettes, and generous readers of this chapter. Their many excellent comments and suggestions have helped shape the chapter in important ways.
- 2 So this chapter is not about the other meaning of vignettes in social science research, where they are sometimes used as examples or scenarios to spark conversation or response of research participants.
- 3 UK Supreme Court, R v Sally Lane and John Letts (AB and CD) (Appellants) 'Anonymity Order,' July 11 2018, at: <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/uksc-2017-0080.html>
- 4 Defendant CD, <https://globalnews.ca/video/4611014/father-of-jihadi-jack-i-need-your-help-to-save-my-sons-life/>, at 00'40
- 5 Fieldnotes, London, November 2018.
- 6 In this particular case, after having realized the extent of the corporate sponsorship of the seminar, I decided to decline the offer of the think-tank to reimburse my flight, claiming the expenses from my own research budget instead. However, I regard this to be a situated, ethical decision, and not a generalizable stance on accepting or rejecting reimbursements from particular institutions or places.

References

- Ackerly, Brooke A., Maria Stern and Jacqui True (eds) (2006) *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Adler-Nissen, R. and V. Pouliot (2015) 'Power in practice: Negotiating international intervention in Libya,' *European Journal of International Relations* 20(4): 889–911.
- Bryman, Alan (2012) *Social Research Methods*. (4th ed.). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bueger, Christian and Manuel Mireanu (2015) 'Proximity,' in Claudia Aradau, Jef Huysmans, Andrew Neal and Nadine Voelkner (eds) *Critical Security Methods*. London: Routledge, pp. 118–141.
- Cohn, Carol (2006) 'Motives and methods: Using multi-sited ethnography to study US security discourses,' in Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern and Jacqui True (eds) *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 91–107.

- Dauphinee, Elizabeth (2010) 'The ethics of autoethnography,' *Review of International Studies* 36(3):799–818.
- De Goede, Marieke (2018) 'The chain of security,' *Review of International Studies* 44(1): 24–42.
- De Goede, Marieke and Beatrice de Graaf (2013) 'Sentencing risk: Temporality and precaution in terrorism trials,' *International Political Sociology* 7(3): 313–331.
- Felman, Shoshana (2002) *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gitelman, L. (2014) *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Haraway, Donna (1988) 'Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective,' *Feminist Studies* 14(3): 575–599.
- Humphreys, Michael (2005) 'Getting personal: Reflexivity and autoethnographic vignettes,' *Qualitative Inquiry* 11: 840–860.
- Jones, Graham M. (2014) 'Secrecy,' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43: 53–69.
- Latour, Bruno (1999) *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lisle, Debbie (2016) 'Waiting for international political sociology. A field guide to living in-between.' *International Political Sociology* 10(4): 417–433.
- Maillet, Pauline, Alison Mountz and Keegan Williams (2017) 'Researching migration and enforcement in obscured places: Practical, ethical and methodological challenges to field-work,' *Social & Cultural Geography* 18(7): 927–950.
- Michael, Mike (2012) 'Anecdote,' in Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford (eds) *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*. Routledge, Oxon and New York: Routledge, pp. 25–35.
- Montgomery, Johnna (2017) *Critical Methods in Political and Cultural Economy*. London: Routledge.
- Page, Tiffany (2017) 'Vulnerable writing as a feminist methodological practice,' *Feminist Review* 115: 13–29.
- Pillow, Wanda S. (2003) 'Confession, catharsis of cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research,' *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16 (2): 175–196.
- Rappert, Brian (2010) 'Revealing and concealing secrets and research: The potential for the absent,' *Qualitative Research* 10(5): 571–587.
- VanVeer, Elspeth (2018) 'Invisibility,' in Roland Bleiker (ed.) *Visual Global Politics*. London: Routledge, pp. 196–200.