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Ethnography In and With Bodies

Embodied Learning and the Academic Life

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ABSTRACT | The body is a vital part of ethnographic experience and learning. This essay reflects on the complex work that the body does during ethnography, not just as an instrument for data collection, but as a means of collaboration, a site of embodied learning, and a conduit for connection and communication that is more-than-verbal. In this contribution we reflect on research engagements that have been profoundly embodied, involving deep embodied learning and communication, touch and connection in the contexts of childbirth, infant care, and midwifery. Building on experiences in China, Laos, New Zealand, and Australia, we discuss the richness and the challenges of consciously collaborating with, in, and via bodies and embodied communications. We also explore what might be learned from the embodied experience of ethnography that we can bring back into academic life: are there lessons we can learn from collaborating with bodies that can help us to thrive amongst the challenges of the neoliberal university?

Keywords: embodied knowledge; affect; maternity; care; vulnerability

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Introduction

For ethnographers, our bodies are our research instruments. These bodies are enabled and connected with our places and subjects of research through notebooks, airplanes, recording devices, computers, but *being there*, in the 'flesh,' is really what matters. The affective and embodied labour of doing ethnography is well recognised in countless pieces of writing but for each ethnographer, the lesson must be learned anew, in and through their own body. At some point, we each must learn to collaborate with our body, *this* body, that we find ourselves in, interconnected with others through assemblages of affect and objects. In much the same way that the research instrument of the spectrometer or the MRI machine must be calibrated, cared for, and interpreted with its individual quirks in mind, so too does each body require consideration in ethnographic work. Visible markers of gender, race, or (dis)ability require us to carefully consider our positionality in the field, how we are observed, perceived and represented by others. Indeed, it is no coincidence that thinking and writing about the body has been spearheaded by women and minorities in the academy. For many of us, still, transcending the body is the marker of success in the academic world. The norms of academic writing seldom make space for an explicit recognition of our embodied realities: childbearing, ethnicity, gender and chronic conditions are wiped clean from the twelve-point-font, double spaced manuscripts.

This essay is an exploration of what we might erase when we attempt to wipe clean such bodily presences, an experimentation with writing through the body, and a contemplation of what kinds of scholarship may become possible. What might happen if we pursue a conscious learning with our bodies – collaborating rather than erasing the embodied self, finding language for what is more-than-rational, more-than-cognitive, preverbal or nonverbal, experienced but not articulated? We reflect on the complex work that the body does during ethnography, and not just as an instrument for data collection, but as a means of collaboration, a site of embodied learning, and a conduit for connection and communication that is more-than-verbal. We offer an experiment with how such sensory learning and bodily-knowing might be communicated in the space of academic writing – a medium characteristically dis-embodied and un-feeling, in which registers of the physical and the emotional are very often deliberately diminished or pushed to the side in the performance of professional identities and the formal tone required for much academic publishing. We experiment with how the sensing, feeling, and caring of embodied selves might open up an expanded field of knowledge and knowingness. In this speculative essay, we recount experiences of fieldwork and academic work with and in bodies. We take turns to remember experiences in 'the field,' and offer collaboratively written explorations of how they spark sensations that may just offer recuperative potential for academic life.

Kelly, Christchurch 2019

The baby grizzles, sitting on the floor, dribbling and fussing with a chewy toy in his mouth. He is teething and unhappy, but as the youngest of four, must somehow fit into the daily schedule of preparing for school and work. The noise escalates

and then subsides as I pick the baby up and he nuzzles into me for a cuddle. He is big though, and I can't carry him on one arm. I rely on a long cloth to wrap the baby on me if I need to get anything done at this time of day. I scoop him on to my back, fiddling with the cloth to get it just right. The tension has to be exactly right so that he is held against my back securely but not uncomfortably tight. I take my time, wriggling him around even as he fusses, adjusting the fabric just so, before tucking the long ends of the cloth under his legs so he doesn't fall out and in again at the front so I am carrying him as if wearing a backpack.

I can do this now in about two or three minutes, but it took me three children and ten years to master it. It's called a 'Tibetan' carry, but in all my time doing ethnography on the Tibetan plateau with my first baby, I never saw a Tibetan carry their baby in this way.[1] If I had, I surely would have stopped someone and asked for help to get my first child on my back – and possibly failed. This knowledge, the knowledge of how to wrap and carry a baby with a simple piece of fabric, is knowledge I could not learn from a book, or even a YouTube video (though I tried). Each time I tried with my older children, it would end in tears for us both, sweaty swear words, sore arms and neck, and a sense of failure. With practice, however, I got better. No amount of explaining really helped – I just had to do it, to feel it, to experiment with holding and tightening and tying in just the right way. I also had to learn how to move, just so, to comfort him and perhaps even get him to sleep in the initially unfamiliar back carry.

Today, it works. The years of embodied practice provides tangible payoffs – lunches are made, teeth are brushed, children are readied and hugged, baby is comforted by the bodily presence of a parent – that fine-tuned instrument of movement and warmth. This is an essential embodied collaboration to getting any writing done today.

Writing ethnography is as much an embodied experience as doing ethnography, but, in our home discipline of geography at least, we are less likely to foreground it. Performance ethnographers in other fields actively embrace the 'intelligence in the body' (Olomo 2006: 339), and Māori researchers draw on understandings of mātauranga/knowledge and whakaaro/thought as embodied (Smith, Maxwell, Puke, and Temara 2016). There are also odd spaces in our universities and conference circuits where the full person is acknowledged and, often, ethnographic work is integral to these spaces. More common in our field, however, is to somewhat ignore our bodies as we translate, transcribe, and transform our ethnographic experiences into 'professional' conference presentations and structured arguments.

Writing is also an affective experience that we are unlikely to acknowledge, despite the many writers' guides reminding us of this (Lamott 2015). We seldom give recognition to the emotional labour of remembrance, the exhausting micro-management of schedules and writing environment, the affective pull of our families, and colleagues who want us to do just this one thing. Writing ethnography is as much a more-than-rational encounter as doing ethnography, but we do not often think it wise to foreground this. We often worry

about the vulnerability of communicating in non-academic modes of writing, seen as sentimental, wishy-washy or a cop-out from the task of editing for clarity.

In this essay, we have structured our reflections around three interrelated points on learning through and with the body, linked together by the device of the rebozo: the long woven piece of fabric used in many parts of the world to support women in labour, wrap women post-childbirth, and carry babies close to the body. We have written this sitting across from each other in uncomfortable chairs on a repurposed board-room table while a blustery southerly blows and our coffee rapidly cools in generic university-owned mugs. We have dropped our children at school, Kelly carefully unwrapping her baby off her back and passing him to his father for care, Katharine settling in her children in an unfamiliar school while visiting Christchurch on a fellowship. Our pomodoro timer begins, our structure is drafted, we sit and write, careful to stand and stretch limbs and hands and thank bodies for five minutes each time it goes off.

Fieldwork with bodies

The attention to self demanded by ethnographic field work is well recognised in contemporary geographical literatures on ethnography. Discussions of the need to attend to the 'self' engaged in fieldwork include debates about how to navigate one's own beliefs and sense of the 'truth' against the truths of others in cross cultural work (Shanafelt 2002; Dombroski 2011a, 2011b); the need to grapple with awkward questions of positionality, power, and privilege of the fieldworker (Abbott 2006; Katz 1994; Kobayashi 1994); and the often difficult, and sometimes traumatising, overlapping of personal emotional relationships and the professional work of 'gathering' data (Diprose, Thomas, & Rushton, 2013; England 1994; Warden 2013). Increasingly, the fact that the self is an embodied self has become a focus for reflection and debate, and the presence and meanings of 'bodies in place' (Nast 1998) opened up for exploration. This includes consideration of the ways that 'body-talk' can be deliberately used to elicit connection and communication across difference (Parr 2001).

In ethnographic fieldwork, the researcher is their own research instrument. Like the equipment that might be used to extract core samples of soil for a soil scientist, or the devices used to create and analyse mapping data for a geographer using GIS, research instruments must be kept in good working order, they must be maintained and cared for. In ethnographic fieldwork this means making sure you get rest, time out from the round-the-clock practice of being attentive to the surrounds and relationships you are embedded in. It means remaining attentive to those who you are seeking to learn from/with, and being attentive to yourself. Over the years our fieldwork practices have come to incorporate planning ahead for care of the researching self: making space in bags for portable yoga mats or running shoes or our favourite coffee. The accoutrements required for the body to feel not only comfortable but *comforted* extend to things, objects, food – an array of other-than-human stuff that accompany us into situations where we are likely to feel *un*comfortable much of the time, and assist us to gain vital moments of respite.

The body, and the stuff we connect to and work with as we care for it, are also tools for learning. Ethnographic methods give ample recognition to the observation work done by eyes and ears, the recording done by hands and notebooks, and the cognitive and interpretive functioning of the mind. But bodies also learn and bodily learning is crucial to working across cultures. With time one learns different ways to comport oneself, that knowledge sinking into the automatic movement of the body as it becomes intuitive (Dombroski 2018). How to walk down a street safely in Port Moresby, how to sit well on the floor in northern Laos, how to eat with hands while never putting fingers in your mouth, or to gesture to an object without pointing; learning to feel the disgust of someone wearing shoes on the tatami, or going barefoot in a house in Chengdu – these become natural, instinctive, and ultimately embodied knowings not because we read about them or are told, but because we live them with our bodies.

Kelly, Xining 2007

If I was doing this in New Zealand, I would have just put the baby on the floor. But somehow, I have to get her out of these wet pants and into a clean pair without laying her down on a – seemingly sparkling clean – floor. You just can't put a baby on a floor here in Xining, western China. At least, it doesn't feel right. I've never seen a baby on the floor. On a heated kang that functions as both bed and living area, yes. On a family rug in a Muslim home that functions as a kind of on-ground couch, yes. But on tiled floors, it just isn't right.

I've seen other families manage this – with Grandma and Granddad holding the baby between them, changing on their laps. I once saw someone do it on a piece of newspaper. But mostly, local caregivers are more skilled than I am at knowing when baby is going to wet, and holding them out in the appropriate place (including, as it turns out, tiled floors when necessary). I look around carefully and see there are grandmothers watching. Grandmothers are my best signal for when I am doing something socially inappropriate in this space. At some point, these grandmothers come to live in my head – or perhaps my limbs – to act as my Xining-spatial-awareness monitor. Setting off inexplicable alarms or slight warnings when I suspect, in my body, that something is not quite right. Babies lying on the floor is not quite right, I know.

I lift the sling over my head and spread it out on the tiles. Working quickly – as it still doesn't feel quite okay – I change my daughter's Chinese-style split-crotch pants and stash the wet ones in my bag. I put the sling back on while holding her in my arms – again, not okay to put her on the floor – and secure her again. This research instrument, this body and my daughter's body, experience the different in hygiene spatiality and babycare in a more-than-rational way that exceeds explanation. I just know now, what is acceptable. The trick is to pay attention to that knowledge, to acknowledge my body and somehow write and communicate it in my work on hygiene and space in western China. It is more than a tool or instrument and meaning and knowledge spill over in excess of what can be communicated in text. The spectrometer only partially accesses the possibilities of the substrate;[2] yet the learning of the body as a research tool exceeds what can be expressed or understood rationally.

Both the body as research tool that must be cared for, and the body as a conduit of learning, prompt us to think about the body as a collaborator in ethnography. The body is not just a capsule for the mind (or the soul) but a 'lively' thing, an 'agential object' as Colls and Fannin put it (2013: 1100). Remembering the 'leaky body' of the pregnant woman (Longhurst 2004) and the 'wilful body' that many women find themselves in during childbirth (McKinnon 2019), we wonder about recognition of the body, not only as an instrument, but as an active partner in research. Along with the accoutrements and practices that we engage to care for it, what might thinking of the body as both an integrated and distinct member of a fieldwork collective do for how we do ethnography? What knowledge/ knowingness it is possible to glean? And where does this leave us as academics, embedded as we are in institutions and bureaucratic systems that give little space to the unruly dictates of the embodied self?

Analysing with bodies

Social science training does not foster skills of learning with the body, nor the communication or interpretation of what we come to know through the physical sensations of the body. Even the old (and now discredited) VARK model of learning, that claimed that people naturally fall into one of four categories of learner (visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic), only posited kinesthetic learning as a mode of absorbing knowledge (Scott 2010), not as a mode of learning that actually generated new knowledge in the physical experience. There is a whole field of psychology that investigates the feeling-of-knowing that sits on the tip of the tongue (Hart 1965; Bless and Forgas 2000), but what of the knowing that emerges *from* the body?

Katharine, Laos 2019

I am lying on the floor of the hospital waiting room in the mountains of northern Laos. The tiles are cold, it has been chilly in the mountains these past weeks. I am on my back with my knees folded up to my chest. I feel my pelvis spreading, feel the hands of my friend, the midwife, on my belly and kind words, 'are you okay?' She waits for the answer, her hands attentive and warm. I nod and she returns to her demonstration. She is teaching a group of village health workers, midwives and doctors techniques for supporting a woman through a difficult labour. My 'baby' has shoulder dystocia – it is stuck in the birth canal, its shoulder trapped behind the bones of the model pelvis I hold with my hands. The vulnerable position I am in spreads the bones and help to let the baby through. I feel the opening in my own body, and I am grateful for the modest traditional skirt (sinh) *I am wearing, and for the midwife's protective touch.*

Everyone has a turn to play the mother in labour, the men as well. They lie on the ground, or squat, or kneel, and moan and groan and fall about in hysterical laughter as they play the part. They too get to feel the opening in their pelvis and experience the vulnerability. Every successful 'delivery' is met with cheers. They all have known babies to die and mothers to suffer, and have had to live with their own inability to save them.

Every now and again one of the Australian midwives I am shadowing is asked to attend to a woman that has come in to the clinic from her village. On these occasions the rebozo is inevitably brought out, and its many uses demonstrated: as a support for the belly, a way of relieving pain, and a 'rope' to hang on to during labour. I witness pregnant women, often initially suspicious or hesitant, submit to the ease and comfort the rebozo brings them, their faces relaxing as they respond to the gentle touch of a midwife.

I have entered this research wanting to attend to the ontological differences signalled by culturally diverse, place-based practices in labour and post-partum care. I want to explore what women's experiences in this place might teach us about how childbirth is not a universal feminine experience. But the shared response to the comfort of the rebozo; the warmth and connection of touch; the mutual understanding that grows from taking turns to be prone and vulnerable, feeling one's pelvis opening on the floor – these seem to exist simply as a shared human feeling that resists the complicating tendencies towards postcolonial angst, minority world guilt, or valorisation of either the 'Western' biomedical or 'Eastern' cultural wisdom.

Now I am home. The remnant sensations of opening and connection are fading. I try to recall the warmth of attentive touch and the lightness of the laughter that came along with learning how to save a mother and childs' lives, and feeling of warmth that seeped into my bones during the weeks spent amongst these women. I try to find words to articulate my experiences, but the feelings sit in my limbs and resist language. I can feel myself shrinking back to the cerebral as I try to make meaning of my weeks in the mountains and turn to the work of writing and analysis.

There is a knowing that seeps into the bones, emerges from the spread of the pelvis bones during a simulation of childbirth, or is perceived in the moment that worry-lines on the face smooth over and the unconscious anxiety that grips your shoulders falls away. Mitch Rose (2018) suggests to us that when something is brought into our consciousness, into the realm of the rational and articulable, what is enacted is an (imperfect) effort to lay claim to it, to possess it. For Rose, consciousness is very different to the non-cognitive engagements that dominate our entanglements with corporeal existence. In our work, however, we have proposed that the experience of labour and childbirth suggests there is something in between the consciousness-as-claiming that Rose describes, and the non-cognitive. Something important that is different to the debates about representational or non-representational that have interested human geographers in recent years (Thrift 2008). Terming this a 'maternal consciousness,' we suggest that during labour many women enter a terrain of 'labour land' during which:

> something that is neither just of the body, nor just of the speaking, decision-making self, comes into play. That altered state makes possible a "maternal consciousness" particular to the shared body-mind work of labour" (McKinnon 2020: 44).

Could these different forms of consciousness be a source for an alter-rationality?

Performing the embodied academic

For the last several years we have been thinking a lot about the maternal experience and what that opens up for how we understand the world, how we organise ourselves, and what we value (Dombroski et al. 2016; McKinnon, Healy, and Dombroski 2019). In the academy we are really good at analytical, critical thought. We value head-work. We perform the unemotional, rational thinker; we develop a craft of words and language and numbers; and among feminists we may speak about the messy fleshy stuff of life, but we do not often live it. We do not often perform it as scholars. We learn how *not* to display our vulnerability, our embodiedness, our leaky, frightened, loving, other-than-rational selves. And for so many of our colleagues, especially those senior to us, that performance goes along with an absolute unquestioning acceptance of, in fact a mastery of, an institutional form that is deeply masculinist, heteronormative, dis-embodied, and 'rational.' As experts, we learn how to make our arguments watertight, we learn how to perform mastery, we learn to speak with a voice of authority.

This type of performative academic subjectivity has been named as the 'super-ableist geographer' (Horton and Tucker 2014: 83), and ethnographers within geography will certainly feel pressure to conform to an academic culture in which self-confidence, productivity, stamina, ambition, and charisma are all anticipated and valorized (Conradson, 2016). Despite our best efforts, this habit seems to persist amongst ethnographers and feminist scholars in spite of a now rich tradition of displacing and decentering the masterful 'knowing subject': consider Robyn Longhurst's work to alert us to the vulnerable and unruly 'leaky' body (2004), or Eve Sedgwick, and subsequently J.K. Gibson-Graham's, explorations of the value of 'weak theory' in place of a paranoid diagnostic 'strong theory' (Sedgwick 2002; Gibson-Graham 2006), or Sara Ruddick's compelling case for the legitimacy and analytical power of maternal thinking (1989), or bell hooks who teaches us that teaching can be a liberatory and peace-building practice of transgressing boundaries in partnership with our students (2014). Tiffany Page's explorations of 'vulnerable methodologies' admits the unsettled disturbance of not knowing in the practice of reflexive ethnographic research, and the telling of other people's stories (Page 2017). These scholars, along with many others, offer compelling avenues for a feminist mode of decentred and unsettled academic scholarship. Yet it is rare to admit vulnerability in the delivery of these contributions, in writing, keynote talks, conference panels. The performance of professional academia belies the feeling, touching, vulnerable, messy, in-motion people we are.

The mask of professional mastery is undoubtedly a benefit at times, but we are also curious about the costs of not admitting that embodied, de-centred, vulnerable self to the *practice* of academic life. Our own experiences of becoming mothers has often involved struggling with the contrast between mothering-life and professional-life. This is not uncommon, as evidenced by discussions in online groups such as the 'women in academia' or 'fieldwork with kids' Facebook groups, or Twitter hashtags such as #academicmama, as well as in popular considerations of the pleasures and challenges of combining parenting and research (see for example Sohn 2019). It is not just us who are disturbed by the

daily transition between the intensive holding, touching, loving, empathising, and attunement to the non-verbal cues of infants or emotional tirades of toddlers, to a neat, ordered, intensively cerebral space in which emotions are usually kept tightly in check (Leonard & Malina 1994). And the issue is not limited to mothers – many academics struggle with the expectation to perform guarded professional subjectivities despite the intensely emotional realities of life as an academic, including rejection and personal investment in work (Paige et al. 2019).

For academics around the world, professional expectations appear to be increasingly difficult to meet within the 'neo-liberal' and the 'PR' university in an age of audit culture (see Cronin 2016; Dowling 2008; Sparkes 2007). Andrew Sparkes, in his paper entitled 'Embodiment, academics, and the audit culture,' tells the story of Jim, a composite character based on informal interviews and personal experiences in United Kingdom Universities. Jim is a 'Director of Research,' suffering through the deeply distressing, and very embodied experience of undergoing the British Research Assessment Exercise (RAE): he relates the bodily sensations panic, anger, helplessness, and despair as he is forced to submit himself and his staff to a process he finds both brutal and meaningless. While experiences of these kinds of auditing exercises are certainly diverse (Cupples & Pawson 2012), most commentators agree that the pressures on academics seem only to have intensified. The stories told in Julia Cupples and Eric Pawson's Christchurch workshop, for example, as well as those recorded in the Precarious Places Project (https://precariousplaces.net/) certainly testify to this.

Yet Sparkes offers Jim's story in the hope that 'the reader might think with the story and see where it takes them' (2007: 540), that it will resonate and be a story that readers will 'look after' and 'when it is needed, share it with others' (2007:540). Cupples and Pawson (2012) note the possibilities for subtle reconstruction and description of one's own research story, including community service, in the narrative based system of New Zealand's Performance Based Research Fund. Likewise, The Precarious Project provides an opportunity for academics to tell their own stories anonymously. Both these practices offer the telling of a story, the sharing of experience, as a response to the visceral distresses of life in academia, and the brittle vulnerability that goes with it. What more might we be able to do for each other?

Katharine, Castlemaine 2013

Encountering the rebozo in Laos took me back to my own experiences with it after the birth of my youngest child. When my third daughter was born I was 39, a 'geriatric pregnancy.' I woke on the morning of her birth knowing it was going to be soon. Labour began in earnest during breakfast, and by midday I was holding her in my arms. About a week later, when my midwife was visiting and asked how I was feeling, I found myself saying to her that I just felt kind of not-together, kind of vulnerable and brittle. I didn't feel strong. She explained that fast births are often like that – the body opens rapidly and afterwards struggles to draw itself together again. So she got out her rebozo and she did a postpartum wrap, a 'closing of the bones'. Wrapping me, and squeezing my body, starting with the

feet and working her way up. It was the most extraordinary experience, it felt like I was being knitted together.

The sensations of being comforted and cared for invoked by being wrapped in the rebozo are sensations we sometimes long for in our academic lives. That brittle vulnerable feeling following childbirth is akin to the difficult feelings that arise during academic work: the nervousness of delivering a lecture to 800 bored students, sending a paper off to a journal for review, presenting at a conference of critically-minded peers. We academics regularly deal with the terror of exposure, opening our intimate thinking to the scrutiny of others, and being torn down. All the while being expected to manage a widely varying array of duties across teaching, research and administration, with workloads that are rarely achievable within our contracted hours of work.

Are there equivalents to a rebozo wrap for academic work? The sharing of stories through forums such as the Precarious Project (or in conference sessions where participants are encouraged to read out their worst rejection letters) offer the catharsis of sharing and of recognition (see also the various stories in Paige et al. 2019). But is it possible to do more? To offer something with the healing and reconstitutive intention of the rebozo wrap? Is the feeling of being wrapped, knitted back together, with the attentive and attuned touch of another – being a recipient of that practice of care – something that can also happen in the academy? How could an attunement to the more-than-cognitive knowing of bodies, and accompanying vulnerability, expand the possibilities for how to comport ourselves as academics?

The performance of a different kind of scholarly self might be one way to admit a richer, fuller, more generous mode of humanity to enter the academy. Ethan Miller (2019) raises the question of how to enable ourselves to step into spaces of radical experimentation and becoming-otherwise without fear of losing the precious bit of stability we might already hold. In his reimagining of livelihoods, he describes the need for decomposing and recomposing the possibilities of life, and the shape of livelihoods, pointing out that a necessary step is to make ourselves vulnerable, to 'decompose,' so that we might reconstitute ourselves in new ways more fitting to the urgent demands of the Anthropocene.

Making ourselves vulnerable and reconstituting ourselves as whole persons might best be set aside for specific times of 'rebozo wrapping' where we can feel held and safe by like-minded colleagues rather than awkwardly out there alone. For example, participants at the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics & Native Americans in Science 2019 conference reported on video and Twitter that for the first time, they felt their 'whole self' could be present professionally, in a conference focusing specifically on Indigenous peoples working in STEM.[3] It is a heartening prospect that there are ways to create spaces and places where our whole selves might, for a short while, be present in academia as complex, full, embodied ethnographers. We wonder how it could be made habitual to create spaces where it is safe to deliberately make ourselves vulnerable, expand the moments in which the rebozo is close at hand, and where, with others,

we might offer and receive the attentive care needed to knit our full selves back together. But we have not yet mastered this, and we do not have a tight, well-argued answer.

Conclusion

In the work of transformation, feminist economic geographer JK Gibson-Graham notes that we can start with what is at hand – to cook from what is present in the pantry rather than shop to cook (Gibson-Graham 2006). In the work of collaborating in ethnography, we too can start with what is there and foster collaboration. We all have bodies, different bodies, differently abled and differently marked. The body is what is at hand, the thing that we can never really escape no matter how intense the pressure of the disembodied academic performance measures might bring to bear. Recognising what we have here, honouring and collaborating with the body as always present, always relevant (even when absent in text). As Pākehā academics, mothers, women and ethnographers, our bodies bring particular knowledges to the academy, as do the bodies of every ethnographer. We also are not fixed in the knowledges of these bodies, but we live and work and learn in them. While positionality statements have become standard fare in the work of ethnographers, there is still something to be said for *really* examining what these bodies know – and don't know, and can perhaps come to know – in the work of knowledge production. We wonder what this could look like if it is more-than-rational, what the potential is for working with and through the body in the academy – and indeed have begun to explore ways of doing this (Dombroski & Do 2019; McKinnon 2017). The vulnerability is all too real, but so too is the possibility for different kinds of academies where different kinds of knowledges are acknowledged as already present.

There are so many stories we could tell, so many rationalisations we could make of the more-than-rational experiences and knowledges we have evoked here. To tie our reflections together around a theme or device, we have used the material object of the rebozo. The Mexican term rebozo is a name for a long piece of tightly-woven fabric, emerging as a necessary garment in the hybrid colonial cultures of early 19th Century Mexico. While a plethora of enterprises have attempted to commercialise it for baby carrying, in the end, what we refer to as a rebozo in the contexts above remains a long piece of fabric obtained from whatever is at hand, that can be repurposed in multiple ways as an extension of (mostly) women's bodies. It acts then, not just as a device connecting our stories, but a metaphor for the work of carrying, covering, comforting, and knitting together needed to survive and perhaps thrive in Academia. We can begin with what is at hand, and our vulnerable bodies can learn and adapt and come to know how to move, and indeed to care and collaborate with other bodies and objects. What is the thing, or who are the people that carry, cover, comfort and knit us together in Academia? What is at hand? What can we make from what we have already, as ethnographers and bodies? It is this question that we would like to end with, to evoke something of the possibilities we might yet discover.

Notes

1. Which is not to say they do not use it. I was in an urban area mostly. Likewise, I saw plenty of people in Bhutan use this carry and a rebozo when I visited pregnant with my 4th child in 2018.

2. To reference Latour and Woolgar, 1979.

3. See the SACNAS 2019 video at https://twitter.com/i/status/1190481559217815555

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