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## **Ethnography of Police ‘Domestic Abuse’ Interventions**

### **Ethico-methodological reflections**

Faten Khazaei

The assumptions of home as an intimate, private and secure, – in sum an unalienated space – have long been taken for granted, not only in anthropology but also in the broader social sciences. Studies of domestic violence, however, have served to directly question the supposition of home as mainly an unalienable space and to put troubling experiences of exploitation and insecurity centre stage (Maynard & Hanmer 1987). Accounts of domestic violence disrupt the imagination of home as a secure space, demonstrating how home can become a site of violence and terror. For women, home may be the most insecure place within their lives, a place where they are most at risk of being subject to physical, sexual, and psychological violence (ibid). In contrast, men are mostly victims of violence in public spaces (ibid). The gendered nature of domestic violence, intersecting with the gendered nature of household spaces, provides a challenge to normative understandings of a private/public divide. Accounts from scholars and others focusing on domestic violence have revealed the widespread nature<sup>1</sup> of domestic violence and have transformed an up-until-then private matter into a public social problem demanding public intervention.

Later accounts from black feminists (Richie 2000) as well as classical studies of social control (Donzelot 1997) demonstrated that the homes of poor and disadvantaged groups have always been the site of public intervention/intrusion, where poor/black domesticity was problematized/criminalized as a space of social risk in terms of future delinquency. These studies deconstructed the idea of home as a private secure space to a site of ongoing state intervention and intersecting power relations.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

Based on a 2013 analysis of data over 80 countries, the World Health Organization concluded that worldwide, 1 in 3 of women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.

Departing from this deconstruction or denaturalization of home as a secure private sphere, in this chapter I draw on my own sociological research into institutional responses to domestic violence in Switzerland. I will reflect on my own ethnographic experiences of accompanying a police emergency unit intervening in such cases. The emotions and affects evoked by such events can bring into focus a specific process of home (un)making, in which I was caught, and which presented a challenge to me as an ethnographer and an analyst. My ethnography revealed the deeply contested nature of domestic space, and the lived tensions which exist between characterizations of home as an unalienated/alienated space. Attending to these tensions in my fieldwork meant resisting and deconstructing a romanticized vision of ethnographic immersion that limits the space for pain, conflict and feelings of unease as modes of knowledge production. In this chapter I explore the possibility of an intimate ethnography of violence. I suggest that emotional commitments in ethnography are not only matters to attend to reflexively but are also resources which open up the field as a space of encounter between affects (Mazzocchetti & Piccoli 2016).

### **Accompanying the police: Ethical considerations**

Accounts of violence in intimate spheres cannot be separated from forces of structural violence including those related to the state or to poverty (Hearn 2012). As part of my broader research project, which focused broadly on how various institutional actors intervened in, and provided support to, cases of domestic violence, I set out to conduct an ethnography of police interventions. Remaining aware of the police's role as a major force of control and discipline, this fieldwork required careful ethical consideration around what I was willing to be implicated or involved in, as an ethnographer. When considering these dilemmas in my research design, I believed that cases of police domestic violence constituted a special case, where police intervened at the request of the victim – or at least in her benefit, in cases when they are alerted by a third party.

Domestic violence can be considered as a process of home unmaking whose harm can be minimized by the police intervention, that may, in contrast, be considered as an attempt of home remaking. Such interventions offer the possibility to bring peace- at least temporarily- in the middle of a violent crisis. Critiques of racial profiling and the criminalization of racialized and marginalized groups and spaces relate differently, and less directly, to domestic violence interventions, which are not initiated by police officers' identification of cases or suspects. As police intervene at the request of those involved or implicated, these

interventions are different from the stop-and-search practices which, for example, are a primary focus for critiques of racial profiling.

These considerations around the central objectives of domestic violence interventions, and the focus on supporting victims, were crucial in my choice to conduct ethnography on police interventions, but also in my processes of ethical decision making throughout my fieldwork.

In terms of obtaining consent, ethical issues can emerge out of the tension between transparency – the necessity to disclose the research and its objectives – and any ‘instrumental’ relations between the researcher and participants, motivated by the necessity of collecting and producing useful data (Emerson & Pollner 2001). Scholars have not only highlighted the ethical issues around conducting ethnography covertly, but also around the cultural ideals, demands and ethical limitations emerging from an often-impossible ideal of ‘full disclosure’ or transparency (Lofland 2009). It has been shown that obtaining consent can sometimes be linked to coercion, and so every decision should be evaluated in light of its outcome for participants and for the research. Consequently, the need for social researchers to prioritize the avoidance of harm has been emphasized, as a frame for evaluating questions of transparency (Iphofen 2009).

In the case of my research within the police corps, as a ‘formal organization’, further ethical considerations emerged around the formal requirement to adhere to police security regulations. These security issues related to emergency interventions, and included the mandatory wearing of bullet-proof jackets by interns and observers and the need to obey the instructions of the chief of the patrol. These were conditions that I had to accept to be able to conduct in situ observations of these interventions. The legal obligations of police officers to protect any ‘civil element’ within their company made it impossible for me not to don the blue intern bullet-proof jacket. The acceptance of police regulations also entailed not speaking freely with the subjects of domestic abuse cases.

For my study, following the model proposed by Iphofen (2009), I prepared a checklist detailing the pros and cons of not disclosing my identity to the subjects of domestic violence cases in police interventions. The outcome of this process of ethical decision-making was two pros and six cons for disclosing my role. While according to many norms of research ethics full disclosure and establishing oral or written consent are ethically preferable, the assessment

of my checklist showed that not introducing myself and my research to victims and perpetrators to seek consent during emergency police interventions presented less risk of harm than the opposite.

First, there was a risk that my presence as a researcher could generate uneasiness that could impact on the statements given by victims and perpetrators. This was an unacceptable risk considering the seriousness of the situations and the possibility that future cases could be harmed as a result. A second consideration was my intention to cause minimum disruption to the work of the police officers, so that they could follow their security protocol. The third concern, related to the fact that even *if* I could have introduced myself and requested the consent of the protagonists, I could not have been sure whether their consent was given freely. As I was accompanying the police officers, they could have felt compelled to accept my presence and may not have dared to resist the will of the police officers whom I accompanied. After all, police officers must have already agreed to my presence as they had brought me with them. Fourth, as I abided by the first two principles of anonymity and confidentiality, whereby real names and addresses were never disclosed, the risk of future identification and potential harm was negligible. Fifth, the focus of my research was on how police officers conducted their interventions and asked their questions. Consequently, other protagonists, including domestic violence victims themselves, were secondary sources of information for my research. I did not concentrate on the identifying details of the incidents or on personal information and backgrounds of the people involved. Sixth, there was no other way of obtaining these kinds of data using other sources of information. For instance, conducting interviews with police officers would have provided access to their discourses on their practices but not on what actually happened during the interventions. The report on an intervention comprised a one-page document that was succinctly presented but only focused on the final procedure that the police officers had decided to apply during that intervention, omitting the entire process of decision-making that was entailed. Thus, the process, which was of primary interest, could not be studied using other methods and without being physically present.

Taking account of the theoretical and ethical debates around conducting ethnography covertly, I followed the principle of minimizing harm, and opted not to systematically present myself as a researcher to the people in whose homes we intervened, with the police corps. The most important factor in this decision was my intimate conviction that accompanying a police

emergency unit which intervened at the demand of victims of domestic violence, or to their benefit, and which aimed to stop an ongoing violent scene, was an acceptable goal. This was a goal I could accept to be part of even covertly, without having the time to introduce my work and ask permission, even if their intervention meant intruding on people's intimate sphere of home in which I was not personally invited<sup>2</sup>.

In the following section, I will narrate a police intervention during which I did not have the opportunity to introduce my work and ask for consent from those whose home I entered. An intervention during which I experienced a specific process of home un-making, in which I played, even if passively and unwillingly, a part. This intervention was a critical moment of fieldwork when 'those personal and emotional experiences . . . significantly affect the researcher's understanding of the setting in general or of critical activities within it'. (Emerson 1981: 370) Critically, it was a moment where my own emotional experience attuned me to the lived realities that emerge at the intersection between intimate and state-structural violence. Emotions enable a different sort of knowledge around how 'violence occurs within violences' (Hearn 2012: 157) and how intimate violence unfolds in relation with broader structural social relations. This emotional attunement was not possible without sharing and seeing what constituted the most intolerable violence in the eyes of a woman who had experienced domestic violence and who had asked the police to intervene to help her about it.

### **An Account of the Encounter**

It was a mild evening in May 2016, and I had already been carrying out fieldwork with the police emergency squad in a French speaking city in Switzerland for one month. I was spending the evening and night in the front office of the police station, chatting with the

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of my fieldwork in Switzerland, the Federal Act on Research involving Human Beings required the ethical assessment of research projects by cantonal ethical committees mainly in case of biomedical research (Perrin & al. 2018). Following this requirement, my project was evaluated by the General Prosecutor of the Swiss canton under study as well as my supervisors at the University of Neuchâtel. During these negotiations, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed and were respected in my data management as well as in my final account of the research. These negotiations led to a differentiated strategy of obtaining consent. On the one hand explicit consent was sought from all those professionals involved in domestic violence interventions or support, who were the primary subject of my research. On the other hand, when dealing with those who interacted with these services and interventions, whether as beneficiaries or otherwise, I followed a principle of seeking consent whenever I could be confident this would not lead to a harmful situation. In practice, this meant I obtained consent in some police domestic violence interventions but not all.

commander, when I heard on the radio that a teenage girl had called the police to inform them that her parents were having a fight. The chief of the section assumed that this case was domestic violence and knowing my specific research suggested that I accompany the patrol in the intervention. He told me, 'you may go now, but they will be on their way in less than fifteen seconds'. 'OK, thanks,' I responded. I grabbed the intern flak jacket from the corner of the room and ran to the parking lot.

It was precisely 9:10 PM when the patrol came to the parking lot to fetch me. I got in the car quickly behind a young police officer, the driver. A more experienced officer who was in charge of the patrol sat on his right side. As I was thinking to myself 'imagine if someone got killed because I delayed them', the officer driving announced, 'we will go into emergency mode' and asked me to let them know as soon as I had fastened my seatbelt so that 'we hit the gas' he said. Before having fastened my seatbelt, I told them I was ready, not wanting to cause any additional delay for an emergency intervention. At the chief's prompt, the driver pressed down hard on the gas pedal and sped across the city. Meanwhile, I struggled to stay in place, holding tightly to the handle above my head.

The chief of the patrol told us the case concerned a Cameroonian family. He had received information from headquarters that police had once intervened at that address in 2015 for another domestic violence incident, where the victim had been punched in the face. He asked me if I had already participated in domestic violence interventions and I responded affirmatively. He then observed, 'So you know that we need to first secure the place before and then you can enter. Because interventions at the people's home are dangerous for us, in their apartment, an environment they know well but not us'. He told me of an intervention back in 2005 which ended in a police officer shooting a man in his home, because he attacked him with a knife, which he had hid before the police arrived.

When we arrived at the location, a large building containing several apartments per floor in a working-class neighbourhood, we struggled to enter. No one answered the police officer's ringing. Finally, we saw a neighbour in one of the balconies and the officers asked her to open the entrance door for us. While waiting nervously the chief of the patrol turned and told us, 'I hope he is not smashing her up!'. Finally, the door opened, we found the mailbox and the floor number of the apartment we wanted. Once in front of the door, the younger police officer knocked hard on the door announcing the presence of the police. The door opened and a young teenage girl appeared at the door, guiding one of the police officers

to her mother who was waiting in a bedroom. I followed. It was a children's bedroom with two bunk beds in one corner. The beds were dishevelled and there were a considerable number of clothes resting on the lower bunk and scattered over a little dressing table on the other corner. A woman in her late forties was standing in the middle of it with an expressionless face. She nevertheless looked exhausted. The police officer went to her, I said hello and stepped aside to let him face the woman. I stayed in the bedroom with the young police officer, the woman and her daughter, while the chief of the patrol went to the living room where the husband was waiting.

The police officer asked the woman, 'I need to know what happened.' 'I am tired,' she answered and explained briefly that she had slapped her husband and pushed him when he had punched her repeatedly in the face. She said she had two loose teeth and there was blood in her mouth. She then had asked her children to call the police. Meanwhile, her daughter was standing behind her who now seated on the chair in front of a dressing table. She was trying to comfort her mother by caressing her hair when she suddenly let out a gasp, 'Oh', as several of her mother's narrow braids remained in her hand. She joined in her mother's explanation and added that the father had dragged her mother by her hair on the floor. The woman explained that her children were holding her while her husband was trying to drag her by her hair and that was how several braids were torn from her scalp. 'Did he beat the children?', the police officer enquired. 'No,' the woman answered. The police officer turned to the girl and asked, 'you confirm?', 'Yes' she said.

We learned further that the violent scene had started with a quarrel over a phone call between the husband and his lover back in Cameroon, when he had mentioned the wife's name. The woman went to ask why her name was being mentioned in that conversation. The man finished his call and began to quarrel with his wife, before leaving. Shortly, however, he returned even angrier and announced that he did not want to stay in the home with them anymore, then started to beat her.

The police officer decided that this was indeed a case of domestic violence and that he needed to take statements right there in the apartment. He told his colleague to take the woman's statement and asked the woman if he could send the children to the playground outside the building so that they would not witness the intervention. She accepted and the officer called all the children and told them to go and play in the yard and come back in half an hour. The couple had three teenage daughters and one son who were in the apartment with

us but waiting in another bedroom. I remember, thinking to myself while taking notes, ‘why only half an hour? That will never be enough!’. Waiting for the police officer to return I watched the woman who despite her exhaustion kept her composure and remained emotionless, as if she was accustomed to going through police interventions. I was feeling out of place, desperate and useless. I suggested to the woman who was standing again to sit down and relax and asked her if she needed water. I wrote in my notes how terrible it felt that it was all I could do to help.

The young police officer came back with a whole bunch of forms, while chewing gum and trying to organize his papers. He did not seem to find what he wanted. He asked her, ‘are you afraid?’

- Yes, for my children.
- Do you want to press charges?
- Yes, I am tired. I do not want to see him anymore.
- Is it frequent?
- Every day! And he does not pay the rent nor the bills.

The chief of the patrol came in and asked his colleague to take pictures of the woman’s mouth and the right side of her scalp where her hair was torn out. The woman explained that her husband wanted her to accept his lovers, whom he frequently visited in Cameroon. After a few moments of searching among his forms, the police officer chewing gum, announced to my shock that he would also register the woman as a suspect because she had admitted to slapping her husband. But the woman remained calm while the police officer was rummaging through his forms. He asked:

- Do you work?
- No, I am a housewife.
- Do you have any other income?
- No.
- Do you have any debt?
- No.

The police officers clarified that ‘these questions are because you are also held to be a suspect’ and handed her a form to sign. The woman complained faintly saying she was angry

with her husband and only slapped him once, that it was the first time, but then remarked, 'I know the procedure' and signed the documents resignedly. I remember taking notes of their conversation but writing in parenthesis about my frustration over the fact that they considered her a suspect, wondering what it meant. Did it mean that they were expecting her to receive the blows passively without reacting, and that if she behaved otherwise, she would be treated the same as the perpetrator and have her case registered under that category in the police database? The police officer handed over another form to sign for a centre who would help people who used violent behaviour. He repeated his question again about the woman's profession and how much money she earned and announced to her that she could have an attorney, but the case would be sent to the persecutor for later decision.

After asking for information on the history of the couple, we learned that they were together for fifteen years but got married recently in the last three years. The woman said the first five years went well but since 2011 things had changed,

- What changed?
- Always the same problem, his lovers. We got separated in 2011.
- Divorced or only separated?
- No, only separated, then he promised that he would change.

In 2011 she had pressed charges against him for domestic violence, but ultimately withdrew them, declaring in court that she would stay him because he was her children's father. The police officer then asked about what the children had told him, that there had been three prior episodes of physical violence, and the woman admitted that she had not informed the police in the two previous cases.

After a few moments, the older police officer returned from the living room and asked the woman to pack a bag for the husband because, in following the law, they would expel him from the domicile for 14 days. And as he was drunk, it would be easier if she prepared his luggage with what he would need for two weeks. 'It is for your sake, so that he will leave as soon as possible, we have time otherwise.'

It was at precisely this moment that the children came back, arriving as I had feared for the worst part of the intervention. The man started to shout from the living room, angry that the police wanted to expel him from his home: 'you are at *my* home, this is *my* home, I pay its

rent and you raise your voice to me here?’ We saw him enter the corridor which was visible from the bedroom we were in. He started to open the cupboards of a small storage space at the end of the corridor, throwing things on the floor. He shouted that if he had to leave, this would be for ever, that he would not come back again, and he would take all of his possessions with him. At his reaction, police officers came back to the woman asking her to prepare the luggage quickly, so that they could take him out sooner. But they did not send him out while waiting for her to pack and he continued to shout and throw out clothes and other stuff on the floor. The children were gawking, and some went back to the other bedroom in front of the one we were in. The police officers went to the man in the storage space. The woman and I did not see them, only hear them threatening him, ‘do you want to end up in the police headquarters or what?’ but he continued to shout. The police officers reminded him that it was the law and he did not have the right to come back for 14 days. He replied, ‘I won’t come back at all!’ Then we heard some noises, something like a fight between the police officers and the man. They finally asked him to turn his back so that they put handcuffs on him, because he was not cooperating. At the sight of this the woman’s composure finally broke. Tears began to run down her cheeks, letting her expressionless and resigned mask fall and she turned to the police officers and asked brokenly, ‘Where are my children?’ I was in the corner watching and filling my field notebook, trying to suppress my own anguish and guilt when I heard her. I looked at her, I saw her crying and so did I. But everyone was too busy to notice us.

The police officer answered the woman’s question from the corridor saying the children were in the other room. She started to prepare a sack of clothes, while the police officers were telling her to call back on the emergency number should there be any problem. They informed her that they will keep the husband at the police station for the night, because he was not respectful and cooperative. But they insisted that they were not the judge, and the rest would be decided by the prosecutor later.

Feeling the woman’s deep concern for her children, I left the room and went to the other room where the children were waiting, to try to reassure them. I explained that to calm the situation down, the police officers judged it was better for their father to leave for the night. Then, I came back to say goodbye to the woman, ‘Take care of yourself,’ I told her. We said goodbye and left her apartment at 10:45 PM. Not far from the apartment, in the car, we received a call from the woman, asking for the police to return the residency permits that they

had mistakenly taken with them. They promised that they would bring them back later. And we drove back through the city toward the police station.

Domestic violence interventions often start with the intrusion into people's home in the middle of a crisis, in an emergency situation, which leaves people's lives and homes open to scrutiny, without granting the time to manage how things are presented. I had persuaded myself that the police interventions, even in those circumstances, was an attempt at a home (re)making, bringing peace and calm to people who asked for their intervention.

The experience of this incident however reminded powerfully how much ethnographic fieldwork itself is a politico-relational space traversed by visible and invisible power relations. Home reflects broader socio-structural relations in –it is traversed by relations that precede the home, and which are transformed and reproduced both within and beyond the home. Although I was aware of literature which revealed the domestic spheres of racialized families as sites of state control (Richie 2000), this experience brought my ethnographic attention beyond those forms of violence which were perceptible and visible at first sight, to other forms of violence more imperceptible and insidious. This experience revealed how emotion could be a way of seeing, when feeling in a real-life situation can bring deeper understandings, of the lived experiences of violence, beyond what can be easily captured on the page, in the research accounts of others. The different forms of violence I witnessed made me think about my own role and part in the infliction of additional forms of violence on this woman and my ethical commitment in considering, analyzing and reporting it.

Hearing the victim also named as a suspect served as a sort of symbolic violence, destabilizing my hopeful and supportive image of police interventions. Then there was the mortifying ritual of a police intervention asking her over and over about her professional and financial situation, forcing her to repeat several times that she had no income, that she had no job. There was also the behaviour of the young police officer, chewing gum and rummaging carelessly through his forms and repeating the same questions without really listening carefully her answers to avoid making her repeat her uneasy answers. Then the way statement-taking of the husband was handled, and the decision to announce his expulsion before first taking him out of the house to avoid surprises. And finally, there was the way the officers let the situation get out of hand, to the point where they were forced to handcuff him and drag him out, before the eyes of his children, after miscalculating the time needed for the intervention. This scene finally broke the numb resignation and composure of the woman,

who, worried about her children and seeing her husband's handcuffed and dragged out, burst into tears.

If the ethnographic experience is to enable us to understand everyday life, then attending to the emotional currents of particular situations inevitably forms a part of this. Such attention can result in a sensitive ethnography (Laplantine 2015) when the ethnographer lives and feels in her body and mind what the interlocutors go through. This experience can shed light on 'the very construction of what counts as violence' (Hearn 2012:163) and who defines it. In my case it provoked irreversible changes of perception and positioning leading to new understandings of violence as a continuum. To clarify this, it is helpful to review four viewpoints within the encounter about what constitutes violence, for different actors in different ways.

As a researcher on domestic violence, I was there to look at a concrete case of a specific type of violence – domestic violence inflicted by a man on his wife, within the intimate spheres of the couple's life, and of the home. For the police officers instead, domestic violence was a category of public action, framed by law, and governed by conventions they needed to follow, forms to fill out, questions to ask and people to hear, arrest, or leave alone. Home was an insecure, dangerous place for police intervention, where the familiarity of home to residents presented a strategic threat, which was met with an attentive and controlling presence, and a willingness to use force. For the perpetrator violence came from being expelled from his own home, while for the woman who had asked the help of police, it was ultimately the act of her children witnessing their father being dragged out handcuffed – a second symbolic act of violence in the wake of domestic violence – that broke her self-control and resignation. In addition, she faced symbolic degradation in being registered as a suspect of violence, because she had pushed and slapped her husband who had beaten her, and in being repeatedly and dismissively questioned about her livelihood.

How could this confrontation with the various forms of violence inherent in a real-life police domestic violence intervention can be explored? This was a multi-level violent experience that I shared with this woman and her family. The strong emotions I felt being there, but also when later transcribing my notes, and even when coming back to my notes months later, were bodily and emotionally experiences revealing the embodied experience underlying what one reads about the interrelation between intimate partner violence and broader structural violences within which it takes place. Questioning myself when I was there, about where I was, what I was doing and what I was part of, recalibrated my understanding of

which violence mattered and to whom. This encounter demanded that attention be paid to unspoken violences, that were not at first sight visible, that was silenced or absent if one focused only on a physical act of domestic violence. Attentiveness to these emotions, helped to decipher the woman's concerns from her reactions, and helped to analytically frame police domestic violence interventions as also possible practices of home unmaking (and not only home *re*-making). As Hearn writes, there is a need for 'a change of perspective from seeing violence as always "caused" by something else, to one in which the practice of violence is itself a form of social inequality, an unequal and unequalizing social structural division and relation *of its own*. Violence is a social distribution of *who does what to whom*.' (2012: 164), within which a wide range of actors – including those who seek to intervene, support, or indeed, observe – are inevitably implicated.

### **Conclusion**

Ethnographers' emotions are often considered as biases to be expunged through reflexive writing, or as irrelevant sensationalizing (or miserabilism), and not recognized as an integral part of the investigation. But silencing or ignoring them, does not make them disappear. So, without embracing sensationalism there is interest in the consideration of the ways in which emotions might attune ethnographers to lived realities. As Mazzocchetti and Piccoli (2016) observe, being blind and deaf to one's own emotion, the researcher can sometimes become blind and deaf to her interlocutors too. If the emotions can reveal what words and institutional frameworks silence, it is not only helpful but the responsibility of an ethnographer toward her interlocutors, to take seriously what they experience. All the more so in my work, where I intrude into my interlocutors' homes, accompanying police officers – embodying powerful forms of social control – even if with the intent of helping the victim and arresting a perpetrator. Emotions are born from confrontations with fear, injustice, vulnerability and helplessness, shame and distress, all of which shape lived forms of inequality and ought to inform the gaze of researchers. Emotional attunement to the experiences of those excluded not only reveal new dimensions of power but reveals how power flows through and animates particular bodies, making the ethical dilemmas which surround research a distinctly embodied matter that resists being neatly resolved in advance of the encounter, no matter how carefully one plans or prepares.

Foregrounding emotions does not mean reducing ethnographic methodology to matters of emotional empathy. Rather taking emotions seriously opens up a range of potentialities in

both scholarly understanding and the forging of ethical commitments. Emotional encounters are not only methodological tools but also data themselves. Following Mazzocchetti and Piccoli (2016), I have attempted to interrogate the potentialities and the ethical challenges around including one's own emotions within ethnographic data, without falling into the trap of pure subjectivism. I attempted to show how the researcher can experience her own emotions and lived situations around her in a given ethnographic encounter, when the encounters involve situations of suffering, trauma or violence which affect subjects profoundly. Such emotional attunement expands understanding beyond the silences of everyday life and of power, allowing for a critical interrogation of powerful emotional affects. One can then get closer to things impossible to say when the researcher and the interlocutors are taken in the same lived moment, through a common experience and when 'being with' transforms to 'feeling with' (ibid: 2).