Regulating emotions and aiming for a Ph.D.

Excerpts from *Anthropology Matters*

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ABSTRACT

In this article I will present a range of experiences of graduate sociali-
sation that have been discussed in past articles in the journal *Anthro-
pology Matters.* These are the experiences of social anthropology Ph.D.
students in the United Kingdom. The overarching theme for the article
is 'regulating emotions', and the excerpts presented illustrate how
Ph.D. students experience and deal with different emotional states
that they encounter during the pre-fieldwork, fieldwork and writing
up stages. I argue that the way in which these emotional states are
handled may be just as important, in terms of gaining a Ph.D., as the
increase in knowledge that is the ostensible marker of a completed
Ph.D.

KEYWORDS

anthropology, emotions, graduate socialisation, Ph.D. students, United
Kingdom

Introduction: becoming an anthropologist

What do social anthropology[1] Ph.D. students in the United Kingdom have
to demonstrate – quite apart from knowledge of their area – in order to 'be-
come' anthropologists? More specifically, what kind of emotional quandaries
are they expected to negotiate successfully in their quest to complete the
Ph.D.? This article will highlight some of the experiences of graduate sociali-
sation that have been discussed by Ph.D. students and early career anthro-
pologists in the journal issues of *Anthropology Matters* over the past years.[2]

We are usually told – at least in the halls of U.K. academia – that in order
to get the Ph.D. and 'become' an anthropologist, we need to build our exper-
tise by studying, doing fieldwork, and writing up, until at one point we have
what is deemed to be good enough 'knowledge of the field of research' to be
able to present an 'original contribution' in the form of the Ph.D. disserta-

tion. Until you pass the Ph.D., you are an 'anthropology student': once you have passed, you are an 'anthropologist'. This spotlight, focussed on the moment when our knowledge is deemed sufficient, leaves much in darkness. In fact, to get a Ph.D. and to 'become' an anthropologist – although they do not tell you this when you sign up – you have to do a whole lot more, including learning and demonstrating new ways of speaking, acting, interacting, and new ways of feeling. It seems to me that visceral, emotional and otherwise embodied transformations are integral to the change in knowledge in the case of Ph.D.s, even though they might often escape attention.

On the question of how educational institutions shape individuals' 'self-making', a frequently quoted work is Willis (1977), who examined the ambivalence that working-class 'lads' found themselves caught up in as they (accurately) recognised the school's implicit attempts at re-moulding them, setting them in a different cast, which they resisted. Similar dynamics can be observed in university classes (Britzman 1992). Doctoral programmes are probably more strongly marked by the fact that most people who have enrolled have a personally vested interest in re-moulding themselves in accordance with academic requirements. This does not necessarily lessen the ambivalence that emerges as they recognise that this may involve re-forming themselves as they engage in the creative process of studying, researching, thinking and writing. The tension between conformity and creativity is negotiated with varying results, ranging from the stultifying to the inspiring.

In order to provide a coherent focal point for this article, I shall only discuss one aspect of the more visceral transformations that accompany graduate socialisation, namely the aspect that has to do with learning to regulate emotions. By 'regulate' I mean the process of working on one's emotions – by becoming aware of them, or talking about them, or writing them down – that leads to an emotional change. The change may be slight, or only a matter of degree (such as changing from unbearable confusion to just about bearable confusion), or it may be more substantial (such as changing from confusion to concentrated attention).

I shall present contributions to the journal *Anthropology Matters* that have to do with regulating emotions in three sections: pre-fieldwork, fieldwork, and writing up. These correspond to the (nominal) three years of a U.K. doctoral programme. In the United Kingdom, students are usually admitted to a Ph.D. programme in social anthropology once they have completed a separate master's degree. They then spend the first year of the Ph.D. reading up on their specific field of research, refining their own research questions

and writing a detailed research proposal. The second year is spent in the field, and the third (and possibly the fourth and fifth and sixth) is spent writing up the dissertation. I will explore some of the processes of re-moulding one's self, creating and learning to 'be' in new ways that mark these stages. In the conclusion, I shall turn to the question of what role a journal such as *Anthropology Matters* might play in these processes.

Regulating emotions I: pre-fieldwork

Nico Tassi (Calestani, Kyriakakis and Tassi 2007) describes his own experience of arriving in London to embark on a Ph.D. programme. Initially, he observes, 'the intimidation caused by this cosmopolitan and sometimes hostile city or by the refined manners of English academia was always flanked by a concealed appreciation' (Calestani, Kyriakakis and Tassi 2007: 3). The intimidation and uncertainty was mixed with a desire to learn how to become a part of this bright new world. Doctoral students in the United Kingdom usually call their supervisors by their first names and are given their home telephone numbers: they are expected to be able to appreciate their supervisors' views but also from time to time to hold different views from them in an academic discussion. For first-year students all of this interaction with (often) a new place, a new anthropology department, and a new supervisor requires a rapid learning curve in how to conduct oneself. It can feel exhilarating: 'It felt as if we were doing something important with an intensity, accuracy and commitment that outshone the approximate and precarious working practices of my recent past' (Calestani, Kyriakakis and Tassi 2007: 3).

Tassi then goes on to describe his experience of anthropology seminars, where exhilaration was gradually mixed with emotions of alienation and the need to catch on to 'the powerful language':

> The language was different. Not simply in the sense that it was foreign to me, but also because I could not grasp the code of interaction. I am not talking here of a secretively codified language, but rather of the sensation that the content of the discussion was continuously slipping away without leaving a trace, a handhold we could hook on to. It was as if that 'knowledge' had been magically uprooted from its container and now floated in the void. Under the low ceiling of that large seminar room it seemed as if the world outside and inside of us had ceased to exist. Talking in obsessive detail and anaesthetized language about practices thousands of miles distant from that seminar room probably enabled us to arrange foreign

concepts in clearly marked heaps of sense and nonsense. However, it also produced the effect of alienating words from things (Calestani, Kyriakakis and Tassi 2007: 3).

Being expected to engage in new analytical thinking can feel deeply alienating during the first year of the Ph.D. if this thinking is experienced as occurring at the expense of one's own thoughts and experiences, that is, if one's own thoughts do not seem to have any room under the low ceiling of that large seminar room. Perhaps this is also more likely to occur in the discipline of anthropology, in which research 'objects' (people, places, ways of life) may be of deep personal concern to the student. The student's motivation for starting on a Ph.D. programme may be personal memories of an exciting gap-year in a particular place, or fascination for a particular group because their way of life touches on complex questions that the student has been wondering about for a long time. To have these people discussed, dissected and summarised in an academic seminar may feel like a violation: not just of them, but also of the student's own concerns.

Tassi goes on to discuss the mimicry that students pick up in their attempts to engage with the situation. It is hard once in a while not to harbour lurking fears of being ridiculed or rejected as a first-year Ph.D. student, and so we usually resort to mimicking the language, the attitude, and the thought processes that we observe around us. This is often how learning gradually occurs, and it can have a productive outcome: yet the process itself can be experienced as a disconcertingly ambivalent one. Tassi mentions the brief sense of shame, the feeling of being an imposter, and the feeling of hiding something or covering up, which may accompany the process:

that academic language and those practices, so powerfully neutral, perfectly balanced and tremendously precise, instilled in us almost a sense of shame, first for our coarse expressive skills, and second for the impartiality of our motivations, almost for an excessive personal engagement with what we did. I often found it grotesque but still unavoidable the way we – as students – contrived to find the most refined ways to embroider, sparkle up and eventually hide deep between or behind the words, ideas and feelings that were too mundane, scarcely elaborated … When I asked a male colleague, regarding his upgrading proposal, whether he had been able to frame into words his research interests and intuitions, he sardonically replied: 'Well no, I have been too busy trying to disguise what I really feel about it' (Calestani, Kyriakakis and Tassi 2007: 3–4).

It may take some time for first-year students to play this 'strange but neces-sary game', as Tassi calls it: to try out who they can be, and who they can present themselves as, in their new role as Ph.D. students and potential aca-demics. This raises different issues for different people; some have a strong feeling of playing a role, while others are more comfortable going along with the flow of what is expected of them. In the midst of this, most try to find avenues and formats for their own creative thinking to emerge, even as they slowly re-mould their responses to this new context.

Allow me to turn to my own experience to give another example of first-year re-moulding. For me, one of the initial questions to arise was whether or not I could be 'religious' in the context of a Ph.D. programme. I was studying a Protestant mission organisation and at the same time considered myself to be Protestant, and, perhaps naively, I did not realise that this might have academic implications until about a month or so into the programme, when a period of confusion hit. I mentioned this to Ian Harper, one of the *Anthropology Matters* committee members at the time, who suggested that it might be helpful to write about it. And in writing, I started to be able to reconfigure more exactly all the new binarisms that were bothering me:

> Self/Other, no questioning/incessant questioning, unconscious/rational, private/academic. In a way they are much too tidy. Perhaps that's why they verge on the meaningless. Am trying to remember what Derrida said in *Of Grammatology* about binary oppositions. He would probably ask something along the lines of: By what means has such a system of binary oppositions been made to make sense? What repressions and exclusions does it rely on? … Which concepts would be undecidable within the sys-tem – i.e. which concepts cannot decidedly be placed on either one side or the other of the binary oppositions – and thus threaten to destabilize the system? I remember the best example I have ever been given of an unde-cidable was a zombie. A zombie is both alive and dead, neither alive nor dead; zombies freak us out. So – what are the zombies in the anthropology of religion? I can think of two concepts that I find it difficult to 'decide' – i.e. that I find it difficult to place in the binary schema of the anthropol-ogy of religion. They are 'me' and 'God' (Hovland 2003: 5).

As I thrashed out the matter for myself, it seemed to change slightly. I did not at that point manage to resolve if or how it would be appropriate to use my religious identity as part of my methodology, but the process of writing about it in the academic format of an article for *Anthropology Matters*, and

re-forming it from a personal question into an academic one, meant that I could regulate my emotions in a way that I felt was more acceptable to the academic environment: I could turn my bewilderment into something that more resembled curiosity, and I could turn my feeling of being different into something that more resembled a willingness to question the field that I was learning about. Having it published in *Anthropology Matters* also made me feel that I was more legitimately a part of the anthropological community, although I still did not dare to include any part of the article in my subsequent first-year research proposal.

The voluntary re-moulding that first-year students try to go through includes learning to cultivate new emotions: the emotions tied to having to be part of a specific anthropology department and a wider intellectual community, to intellectual competition, to enthusiasm for one's subject, and to criticism: at this stage, mostly of others. Students need to demonstrate, at the end of the first year, that they are appropriately passionate about their subject, but at the same time detached enough to be able to think about it in an 'academic' manner; that they are willing to discuss and criticise and even tear apart other researchers in this field, respectfully but without remorse, and that they have a strong enough belief in their own creativity (and competitiveness) to claim that in a few years they will be able to say something about their field that nobody else has said. Quite apart from being able to write the first-year research proposal, those who are not able to dredge up or persuasively mimic such feelings at the first-year *viva* (the oral examination) will have a hard time getting through and being allowed to continue to fieldwork.

Regulating emotions II: fieldwork

One of the most powerful and provocative presentations in *Anthropology Matters* concerning the emotions that are encountered during fieldwork has been written by Amy Pollard (2009). Following interviews with sixteen social anthropology Ph.D. students in which she intentionally asked them to discuss fieldwork difficulties, Pollard reflects on their responses under the following headings: alone, ashamed, bereaved, betrayed, depressed, desperate, disappointed, disturbed, embarrassed, fearful, frustrated, guilty, harassed, homeless, paranoid, regretful, silenced, stressed, trapped, uncomfortable, unprepared, unsupported, and unwell. The frank discussion, as well as the four academic responses that were published in the same journal issue, cover

much emotional ground, from fleeting disappointments to serious post-field-work traumas. Needless to say, students also encounter a spectrum of positive fieldwork emotions, ranging from the mildest satisfaction to the deepest exhilaration. In this section I shall draw on some of the articles in *Anthropology Matters* that reflect on how student fieldworkers have responded to and handled some of these emotions.

For those who choose to do fieldwork in an unfamiliar community or place, some of the strongest emotions during the initial period (and for some, throughout fieldwork) may be those linked to culture shock. Rachel Irwin (2007) discusses this phenomenon by drawing on her own experience in Tanzania. She describes the different stages of culture shock that may develop as one encounters and tries to deal with a new culture: honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. Various aspects of the 'crisis' stage are probably immediately recognisable to anyone who has lived abroad: 'A very common coping mechanism is aggression and frustration – a rejection of the environment that is causing discomfort' (Irwin 2007: 2). Irwin illustrates each stage with her own examples, such as the following little vignette, taken from the 'crisis' stage:

> We were homesick. I remember a horrible conversation by lamplight in which we listed every pub, restaurant, and bar that we had been to in Oxford. It is similar to an entry from Malinowski, who writes: 'In the evening talked with Aville about the southern coast of England from Ramsgate to Brighton. This got me … I was depressed' (Malinowski 1967: 28, cited in Irwin 2007: 7).

After a thorough discussion of the encounter with and tentative 'recovery' from culture shock, Irwin in conclusion raises the provocative question of why these emotional processes are so rarely explicitly mentioned among academics or talked about with students in their pre-fieldwork year. Instead, students are often left to regulate their strong (negative) emotional reactions to their new fieldwork setting without much guidance, other than pouring them out in conversations about pubs in Oxford, and sensing that it might be best to exclude them from the final dissertation. Irwin calls culture shock anthropology's 'taboo'. For quite a few it would seem that covering over such feelings forms part of their socialisation process, whether intentionally or not.

For those who do fieldwork at home, or in a place or community that they already have some familiarity with, culture shock may be replaced by a certain uncanny feeling as the familiar space is turned into an object of study.

At the same time, the researcher is confronted with herself – her memories, her loyalties, her position. For my own fieldwork, I was doing research on an organisation that I had been familiar with for most of my childhood, and during that year I wrote a paper trying to get to grips with the sense of the *unheimlich;* the uncanny or the un-home-like at home. 'The uncanny is terrifying because it comes about in a space that we thought was familiar, and that we are unable to separate ourselves from completely' (Hovland 2004: 2). I used the example of an afternoon when I suddenly recognised the almost ritualistic teenage conversion sequence that has at times implicitly been encouraged in this particular Protestant Pietistic tradition, and that I had myself been a part of – and I recognised it in a document from 1842:

> Tuesday twenty-third September, 2003, the mission society, Stavanger. I have just read through an application sent to the mission school in 1842 … Touching and disturbing. For an instant, cockroaches came scurrying out all over the page and swarmed into my head; the sentences written down by this applicant reminded me of states of mind that were suddenly, unexpectedly, all too familiar. 'I now still remained in the state, I was in, and I was now and then so anxious, that I even cried, as I was working', he writes. 'I forgot to keep a vigil over myself… no salvation for me anymore … ' … 'Scarily similar', I've scribbled down in my notes from that day. Underlined three times, and then a few quick keywords, in red … It was all disturbing enough for me to stop reading. I went for a coffee in the canteen instead, T walked past and came over to join me, the cockroaches crawled out of the window. I didn't read the old application again that day but photocopied it and put the copy on my shelf. On the working assumption that anything that throws me is probably important. One obscure episode from an obscure Tuesday afternoon – one among other similarly obscure episodes from other obscure afternoons … One moment I am engaging with something that seems other, that seems strange, only to find that it is suddenly disconcertingly familiar; the next moment I see myself, I see something familiar, only to find that it is something very strange (Hovland 2004: 6–7).

The regulation of these dislocating emotions became an important part of the process of being able to gather data. A little while later, I returned to the application on my shelf:

> I started underlining a few of the sentences written down by this young man. As I read I became gradually more and more interested in him … In my notes from that day there are a few rather more dispassionate, typed

sentences: 'I am not quite sure why it affected me so strongly when I read it last time … It shows how he dealt with himself, how he used God's word both to shut himself in and to be able to come out of himself … an interesting way of gaining an insight into the Christian culture he was in. And the mission culture.' While my notes from the first reading have a sense of immediacy and importance about them, these second notes seem almost cold, a bit detached. But they were the start of an important process (Hovland 2004: 7).

Another issue raised by authors in *Anthropology Matters* is how the field-worker is slotted into different roles, both welcome and unwelcome, by her or his research 'subjects'. Several thoughtful contributions to the *Anthropology Matters* issue on 'Fieldwork Identities' (2009) explore this topic, and while space does not allow extended excerpts here, the resulting emotional work is perhaps aptly summed up in Katherine Smith's (2009) concise question: 'Is a happy anthropologist a good anthropologist?'

This relates to the question of how involved to get with the people one is researching during fieldwork. Mike Wilmore (2001) describes two periods of fieldwork, the first in Nepal and the second at an archaeological project run by academics in the United Kingdom. In both cases he came into the group as an outsider, and in both cases the projects he observed had various internal tensions. In the U.K. project, however, he suddenly found himself implicated in these tensions in a very different way than he had been in the Nepal project. After a project meeting in the U.K., he recorded in his journal:

> I felt sick, physically nauseous, after the meeting. Why? Because it's uncomfortable to arrive and be a part of a project that has obvious problems? I never felt like this in Nepal …. [In Nepal] I was distanced from the antagonism and anxiety that was a factor in the local media project's existence. Of course I was distanced. The color of my skin and the return ticket in my pocket meant that I could and did wave good-bye. Here that's not possible. I'm sick with worry for the future that I'll be part of. The imminent future (when the directors return) and the distant future (my career). I'm only slightly cheered by the fact that I could write an interesting paper critiquing ethnographic practice on the basis of comparing these two bouts of fieldwork. I slept fitfully and woke in the middle of the night and very early next morning (Wilmore 2001: 2).

He was then struck by the question of whether this obvious involvement and participation in the group in the U.K. meant that he had not 'partici-

pated' sufficiently in Nepal: 'It marks the moment when participant observation became a reality rather than an abstract methodological ideal during my research career' (Wilmore 2001: 3). Wilmore goes on to discuss this question in depth, and concludes that although he was differently positioned during his fieldwork in Nepal, this does not detract from the fact that he was positioned there too. His different positions had produced different kinds of involvement.

Jennifer O'Brien (2010), who did research on young people's understanding of HIV in a rural district of Uganda, similarly found that closer connections sometimes brought emotional and ethical difficulties. The following took place one day as she was playing Jenga with two young women:

> Eventually one of the young women started whispering to the other and nudging her until she began to nervously ask me some questions. She explained she had been with her partner for a few months and was concerned that she might be pregnant although she was unsure they had actually had sex. She was 14 and her partner 17. She explained she had already contemplated going to see a herbalist to buy herbs in case she proved to be pregnant but she was frightened because another woman from her village had recently died by taking herbs to abort a pregnancy. She said she trusted me as her friend and knew I was a nurse who worked at the hospital and could therefore give her some tangible advice about what she could do … The young woman explained she could not approach anybody actually at the hospital, even me, because she was underage. She was worried she might be treated badly and that word would spread … It suddenly hit me just how little tangible comfort I could actually offer. The young woman stared blindly at the wooden [Jenga] tower, her shoulders sagging in defeat. I explained about various NGOs in the area that were offering programmes that might support her … She nodded despondently. We finished the game in excruciating silence. Nobody suggested we play again. The sense of personal and professional failure was overwhelming (O'Brien 2010: 12).

The young woman, O'Brien sensed, felt that the gamble in trusting O'Brien had not paid off, and she did not return to play Jenga the following day. O'Brien herself was left with her worry for the young woman as well as a persistent troubled feeling that she should have done more to help her. She discusses the lessons that she drew from this experience concerning sensitive research issues. She also notes that (probably like many others) one of her techniques for dealing with and regulating her subsequent guilt was to turn it into one of the motivations for her continuing research:

In this case, the vigour with which I threw myself into my Ph.D. research, and into later focus groups with the NGO researcher, lay testimony to my necessity to do something to mitigate the emotional impact of feeling I had failed the young woman who asked for help because she thought she was pregnant.

Her conclusion underlines the importance of protecting research subjects – and the researcher.

Christine Barry (2002) approaches the question of participant observation from yet another angle: she was accused of voluntarily getting too involved during her fieldwork. During her research on homeopathy and Tai Chi in South London, she found herself increasingly drawn to these ideas and practices, including practices of meditation, and in her article she records one strong emotional and stimulating experience of group meditation that she had during fieldwork. When she later recounted her embodied experiences to her academic seminar, part-way through her fieldwork:

the feedback from colleagues included the observation that I seemed to have had some kind of conversion experience, and that I was insufficiently reflexive about my experiences. I experienced the sub-text as 'Oh no, she is going native', but refused to disengage from the process, feeling it was taking me into an area of rich data (Barry 2002: 3).

Barry invested a lot in the new interests, experiences and identity that she found through her fieldwork. When she came to the end of her fieldwork period, and began to leave the groups that she had been attending in order to return to the university, she experienced what she terms 'reverse culture shock'. In her journal at the time, she wrote:

I have been thinking about my identity leaving the field. I've started to wonder how interested I am in all this stuff as a way of life. I got swept along by their enthusiasm. The fact is I am not doing Tai Chi now, I do not want to train to be a homeopath, and when I read the Alternatives brochure with its adverts for crystal colleges and so on I find myself reverting to my natural scepticism, even distaste … It's all been very unsettling as I have started to ask myself who am I, what do I believe, and what am I interested in? This ethnography seems like a brutal thing having to go into other people's ways of life and then divorce yourself painfully from it (Barry 2002: 4).

Participant observation is clearly a complicated issue. Pre-fieldwork students may be told – at least as my cohort was – to 'just get involved with what-

ever people are doing' and 'go with the flow'. But there are ways of getting intensely involved during fieldwork that allow one to detach oneself from those involvements as one returns to the university, and there are ways of getting involved that have a deeper and potentially more permanent effect, and that are hard to extricate oneself from without 'turning on' oneself, as Barry reflects on above. Some ways of involvement may also, in some instances, cause students to face a barrage of pressing questions upon return to the university. It is not always easy for students in the field to know exactly what balance between involvement and detachment will later be academically rewarded.

Those who are later told that they have become 'too' involved, such as Barry, learn to re-regulate their emotions so that they become more in tune with the academic community again. Another option, if one finds one has become 'too' involved during fieldwork, is to create a separation between one's emotional involvement in the field and one's academic work. Anna Pertierra's time in the field truly changed her life, as she fell in love and got married during her fieldwork in Cuba (Pertierra 2007). Although she thinks that this experience also made her find out things about her research subject that she might not otherwise have realised, she eventually chose to keep the experience out of her dissertation. In her own words:

> Although I had begun my fieldwork being very comfortable with the notion that participant observation is a markedly holistic process, expecting that a fluidity always exists between personal experiences and research encounters, what I was eventually quite confronted by was my own response to needing to separate 'field' from 'life'. During my fieldwork, I was deeply aware of the potential for the moral and economic context of my relationship to Karel to erode our own confidence in each other, and my informants' confidence in me. As we began to plan the wedding, I found myself echoing Ruth Behar [1996] in hoping that my celebration would not become 'just another anthropological fieldsite', and yet I was surprised at the emotional confusion I encountered in establishing an identity as a bride rather than a fieldworker. However artificial and tentative a separation of fieldwork and personal identities might be, I felt that the alternative – to entirely merge both work-life and lovelife – would create even more problems, making not only my doctoral thesis but perhaps more importantly my marriage too vulnerable to the hardship of academic scrutiny and critique (Pertierra 2007: 11).

An interesting final twist to Pertierra's analysis is given by the fact that although she judged this personal relationship to be best left out of her dissertation, she was able to write about it in an academic format in the article in *Anthropology Matters,* where she used her experience as a vivid illustration of the difficulties involved in participant observation. This shows some of the malleability of different spheres within the anthropological discipline: emotions that are frowned upon in the doctoral dissertation may still be expressed besides it, or after it, in interesting and constructive ways.

Kate Woodthorpe (2007), on the other hand, brought her personal emotions and her academic study together, rather than split them apart, at the end of her Ph.D. research process. Woodthorpe's research was on the social use of a cemetery in London, and as she spent more and more time at the cemetery, observing many poignant scenes, she simultaneously became more and more preoccupied with the thought of her own death and the deaths of those she cared about. In the cemetery, however, she strove to be more detached and 'academic':

> In the field my most significant coping mechanism was to not make the connection between what I was observing and my own emotional state. I intentionally decided to view what I was seeing as 'data', as things that were happening to other people that could be interpreted analytically as a source of insight into behavior in the cemetery. In this vein, in hindsight I believe that I was indeed at least trying to be accurate and 'truthful', even if I was personally having difficulty managing this. Furthermore, I did not relate my research to my own experiences of death and grief, or potential ones in the future. My research and my everyday identity were, to my mind, entirely separate (Woodthorpe 2007: 4–5).

Then a significant turning point came a little while after Woodthorpe had completed her fieldwork and was attending a conference:

> As I sat listening to a discussion on the emotions a fellow researcher experienced when cleaning out her mother's attic after she died, it hit me how great the emotional impact of facing death and grief on a daily basis had actually been. This was something of a lightning bolt reaction, as all of a sudden – by seeing someone else making the link between their own personal experiences of death and their academic research – I became aware that I too was a human being who had personally experienced death and undoubtedly would experience more death in the future … This was

one of my most significant 'rites of passage' into the role of being a (more experienced) researcher (Woodthorpe 2007: 5–6).

Woodthorpe began to go through all her field notes with a new perspective after that, and gradually she was able to lessen the effect of earlier emotions, such as guilt and a feeling of deception, and instead accept the sensitivity of the topic both to herself and to those she had been studying. This opened up doors to new analytical insights, as she was able to return to old scenes and view them with 'new', less anxious eyes. The way that Woodthorpe learnt to regulate her emotions in order to understand and use them seems to have been made possible by honest friends, a supportive supervisor, and seeing the example of another anthropologist who had done the same.

This section started off with Irwin's description of culture shock in 'the field' as anthropology's 'taboo'. Undoubtedly, many Ph.D. students re-mould themselves to fit with the expectation that strong and negative feelings from fieldwork are best suppressed, albeit leaving a residue of uncertainty. The section has ended with Woodthorpe's personal anecdote, which shows that some students are also able to re-configure and re-mould themselves in the academic context in creative ways that to a greater extent acknowledge (and perhaps even resolve) some of the ambivalences associated with changing oneself.

Regulating emotions III: writing up

While in the field, students are left to regulate their emotions more or less as they themselves deem fit, which brings with it its own problems. But once they come back to the university to write up, an array of academic rituals suddenly puts pressure on them to start regulating their emotions in a way that fits in with their department again. Students start seeing their supervisors once more, they start attending post-fieldwork seminars, and they interact with their fellow students.

Students may then be subtly encouraged to 're-evaluate' their emotions from the field. Barry's story, mentioned above, is one example of this. Another example is given by Celayne Heaton Shrestha, who describes how the interaction in post-fieldwork seminars, back in London, subtly legitimised certain emotional attitudes while delegitimising others:

amounting to the development of a new, distinctive emotional style. I experienced an increasing distancing and empowerment, as feelings of cynicism

and indebtedness were encouraged. Other emotions, by contrast, particularly pain or the sense of having been 'hard done by' by 'informants', were dismissed as 'whingeing' and effectively delegitimised – the implication of these emotional experiences lost to analysis. The emotion work carried out during and after fieldwork reinforced the sense of Otherness – informants and I no longer shared feelings: emotions that intimated a degree of 'sharing' were displaced by ones indexing hierarchy and inequality. The feeling of indebtedness (however commendable) contributed to this, as it amounted to a denial of the reciprocity of day-to-day relations in the field. This emotion work also introduced a sense of inequality. Indeed, I was no longer part of a landscape of power that was ever-fluctuating, but in a definite position of power: feelings of (occasional) powerlessness or vulnerability gave way to feelings of powerfulness (Heaton Shrestha 2007: 6–7).

Celayne Heaton Shrestha goes on to reflect on the taken-for-granted mechanisms operating in academic seminars that bolstered these emotional shifts following fieldwork:

Personal anecdotes were not encouraged (nor sought: 'I'm not interested in reading about Celayne', was a classmate's remark to my enthusiasm about the potentials of auto-ethnography) … It was also clear to (some, at least) participants in such fora that the preferred linguistic modalities and interpersonal styles in seminar settings (with a tendency towards the expository rather than the exploratory, the propensity to offer extended commentary rather than the invitation to dialogue), did not lend itself well to the expression of the 'personal' – with the exception, that is, of feelings of debt, power, and responsibility, which were cultivated through the invitation to be 'reflexive' about the experience of fieldwork. Another mechanism was simply the refusal (by teachers or mentors) to engage in talk about emotions or emotionally toned conversations: in this way, it was learnt that emotion talk was 'not relevant' to the academic task at hand. Another mechanism was through 'humour' … Humorous quips more often than not involved the narrator laughing at herself, and further encouraged detachment from the fieldwork experience – the simultaneous creation and repudiation of a 'fieldwork self' distinct from Heald and Deluz's (1994) 'initiate' self reintegrated in the community of scholars (Heaton Shrestha 2007: 8).

It can be a highly ambiguous process to have one's performance in the field critiqued and re-evaluated, and to be encouraged to revise one's memories, re-mould and take on new emotions, in order to be 'acceptable' once more. At the same time, if this stage can be negotiated more or less successfully, it

can also lead to a growing sense of being able to think creatively and constructively about one's experiences in new and different ways. In Heaton Shrestha's case, it seems to have enabled her to create a certain detachment from her fieldwork experiences that subsequently enabled her to write about them; the emotional shifts contributed to the development of her moral consciousness as a researcher, and became stepping stones towards becoming a more mature anthropologist (Heaton Shrestha, email to author, 7 December 2006).

Paul O'Hare (2007) also discusses the step from fieldwork to writing. He describes how students may feel quite 'lost' on leaving the field:

> As I returned to the process of writing and began to realise just how daunting this was, the field suddenly appeared to be rather less intimidating than it did whilst I was there. I had, in the short time since leaving the field, assumed a faint nostalgic warmth towards it … In contrast, writing up was an unknown and daunting task, particularly the prospect of making sense of and representing the cases (O'Hare 2007: 4).

He also observes that during the initial phase of writing, students may be struck by worry over whether they have 'enough' material:

> I had a persistent concern that there remained data waiting to be collected in the field … I found it hard to let go of the field and to get on with writing, a feeling that was not unknown by fellow researchers (O'Hare 2007: 3–4).

O'Hare recounts his own process of gradually being able to handle the apprehensions surrounding his material, and gradually learning to rely on his analytic abilities. In the end – and some time into his writing phase – he was finally able to re-mould his responses sufficiently to be able to 'leave' the field.

Once the field has been left, however, students may feel very disjointed as their often strong experiences of fieldwork are transformed through a 'deadening' kind of process into dry analysis. They may start writing down their intense experiences in a way that seeks to convey some of the vivid interaction with the people they lived with: only to be told by fellow students, as Melania Calestani was, that their writing is not 'academic' enough (Calestani, Kyriakakis and Tassi 2007). Calestani's experience is similar to that of Heaton Shrestha:

> Some Ph.D. colleagues accused me of engaging with travel writing, add-
> ing that this was not real anthropology and that it lacked neutrality and
> objectivity. I felt the presence of the all-powerful ideology of academia in
> their words. They, brilliant students with top marks, advised me to detach
> myself from my writing. I left the room of the writing up seminar feeling
> down and upset and wondering what I should do (Calestani, Kyriakakis
> and Tassi 2007: 9–10).

Indeed, this is perhaps a fair summary of how most Ph.D. students feel
following seminars in which their first written drafts have been critiqued
– down and upset and wondering what to do. In part this may be a useful
stage in the process of developing as a writer; in part it may also, at times, be
a symptom of some dysfunctional seminar practices. Either way, the result is
usually that the student embarks on a process of revising, self-editing and,
sometimes, self-censoring.

The unease that may surround this process is not made better by the fact
that seminars and supervisions often, and quite understandably, place most
emphasis on how to write in order to produce a dissertation that will pass,
and the 'safest' path to this end may be one that heavily downplays personal
experience, emotion, and idiosyncracy. Calestani initially veered in this di-
rection. In the end, however, she could not bear the resulting text:

> The vital energy I had found in my words in Santiago had left the text for
> good. It lacked the texture of everyday interaction … everything seemed
> 'anaesthetized' … a reflection of the interaction I was having with the
> world of academia, a world of competition and politics … On more than
> one occasion I felt isolated, thinking about the emotional commitment and
> attachment to my informants in Bolivia. After a while I decided that I could
> not let academia influence my representation, memories and attachment to
> the Andes. I had to convey at least some emotions. It was then that I began
> to think of how I could combine that outside world that I had personally
> experienced with the academic ideology. Was it actually possible to create
> a text that enabled continuity between life and theory, between the texture
> of everyday existence that strongly affected my perception of the world and
> the atmosphere of anthropology departments? For the first time, I started to
> rationalize the process of writing, a process that was usually characterized
> by a more spontaneous impulse in my case. I thought of writing as a weav-
> ing process, and the Andean world provided a model of inspiration: differ-
> ently coloured strands form a unique picture, producing a piece of cloth

that conveys collective and individual memory, like the Andean *aguayos* (Calestani, Kyriakakis and Tassi 2007: 10).

Calestani in the end reached a creative resolution as she decided to weave her experience in with that of her informants, and with strands of theory, to form her text.

Once students have reached this point, when they are able to think of themselves as writers, a few new challenges crop up. One of these, highlighted by O'Hare (2007), concerns the regulation of emotions that students go through in the struggle to write clearly, to edit, re-edit, and edit again. O'Hare recounts how he initially tried to press as much of his gathered data as possible into his two case-study chapters, ending up with long and unwieldy pieces of writing. This is certainly not an uncommon problem, and O'Hare suggests that it is rooted in certain kinds of anxiety: some students are anxious that they might misrepresent the people they are writing about unless they include a mountain of evidence and detail, and some are anxious about turning the tentative arguments in their heads into clear and coherent arguments on paper for everyone else to see – in case they might be wrong, or sound stupid, or have missed something. Other students may have great hopes of writing something profound, and this can sometimes turn out to be quite paralysing, so that they find it difficult to write anything coherent at all. To top it off, the process of editing and refining a written draft, and deleting already written paragraphs, can be unexpectedly painful:

> The torturous process of editing felt fraudulent – a betrayal of my time spent in the field, and the time expended by research participants for what to them undoubtedly seemed to be obtuse and esoteric academic interests. As I searched through and sorted sections of text, it all seemed important. There was always a nagging doubt as to whether the material I considered deleting really was surplus and I found it easier to leave sections in the text to deal with later on. It was all too easy to become stuck in the detail of the cases, to tweak at their edges without paying enough attention to the overarching themes through which the chapter narrative would be sustained. Ultimately, procrastination became my mechanism for avoiding decision-making and commitment (O'Hare 2007: 7).

O'Hare goes on to describe the 'long, hard and at times tedious slog' (O'Hare 2007:8) that in the end enabled him to shape his text into an interesting story without burying it in caveats, and to put forward his own argument on paper without being overly self-conscious about it.

Once the dissertation has finally been written and submitted, the last stage in the U.K. Ph.D. process is the defence, which takes the form of a closed *viva*, an oral examination where only the student and two examiners are present (and at times the supervisor, although he or she is required to remain silent). Doubtless much could be said about this ritual, and the particular type – not to mention the sheer amount – of emotional regulation that it requires, but this topic has yet to find someone brave enough to address it in *Anthropology Matters* and so I shall end my discussion here.

Conclusion: conformity and creativity

For those of us that follow the entire Ph.D. process through, then, many aspects of ourselves have been re-moulded by the time we 'become' anthropologists. The increase in knowledge has been accompanied by a number of emotional changes and regulations, a process of 'self-making'. To varying degrees, we manage to acknowledge, and perhaps resolve, at least some of the ambivalences that come from being fitted into an institutional context and this is important both personally and academically. Many find ways to understand and use their emotions, and the knowledge that comes out of them, as part of the research process and to strike a productive balance between conformity and creativity.

Of course, everyone engages with these processes in different ways, and sometimes it seems to me that the same processes of socialisation can produce better anthropological writing from one individual – more thoughtful writing, more nuanced, and clearer – while producing worse writing from another individual – more 'dead', more over-stretched, or more disjointed. In part the outcome may depend on the resources available in one's department and from one's supervisor, and in part it may depend on one's own ability to interact with the process and to draw on support and respond productively to critique. Some departments give students a broader range of experiences to incorporate into their own academic (including emotional) development, and more freedom to incorporate those experiences as individuals rather than as a herd. Similarly, some supervisors, lecturers and fellow students are more able than others to tolerate emotions different than their own, and can help students to channel these into constructive work.

Now, in conclusion, I would like to return to another of the questions posed in the introduction: what role does *Anthropology Matters* play in these processes? I have drawn on authors from *Anthropology Matters* who have

described, discussed and critiqued the processes of socialisation that they have found themselves caught up in. But is their critique in *Anthropology Matters* also a part of those same processes? Precisely in raising critical questions, it seems that at least some of them more firmly establish themselves within this discipline, and move closer towards 'becoming' anthropologists. Why is this so? I can think of three reasons. First, it is often easier to feel that one belongs somewhere if one is given the opportunity to voice concerns and critical questions and to be 'heard' – in this case in the form of having one's questions published. Second, in some circles, critical questioning of social anthropology could even be seen as a requirement for being accepted as a *bona fide* anthropologist, so *Anthropology Matters* may serve as quite a traditional stepping stone in the career of students aiming for these streams of critical thinking and writing. Finally, regardless of where students are headed, it seems like a certain amount of agonising and conscious debate about one's academic existence is expected as part of the socialising process of a Ph.D. student: *Anthropology Matters* gives people a space where they can explore this. In this way they are incorporated into this academic regime: or, depending on how you see it, they find their own ways of creating and being within these academic institutions.

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Notes

1. I focus on social anthropology because I and the other authors presented in this special issue were socialised into that discipline. Doubtless many of the processes of socialisation would be recognisable to colleagues in related disciplines. For example, for comparative (and theoretically more sophisticated) views on regulation of emotions among historians, see Peter Loewenberg (1985) on graduate students, George Moraitis (1979) on established academics and Louise Kaplan (2001) on historical biographers.

2. *Anthropology Matters* is a network of Ph.D. students and early career anthropologists, established in the United Kingdom, but with participants from across the world. We focus on socio-cultural anthropology, and the network is affiliated with the Association of Social Anthropologists in the U.K. and Commonwealth (the ASA). Our primary means

of communication is an open email list and an online journal, both of which can be accessed at www.anthropologymatters.com

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