Intersecting intellects, diverging bodies: 'Joint' feminist research in the Pacificⁱ

Abstract

This is a methodological paper that explores research practices in the spaces and power structures of collaborative research involving two feminist scholars who are committed to postcolonial ways of working and are also colleagues and friends. Intersectionality is a core principle in our research and teaching and provides us with the basis of collaboration by enabling an “analytical sensitivity [which] think[s] about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power” (Cho et al. 2013: 795). At the forefront of our project, its conceptualisation, research design and conduct were the relationships to our research of our embodied selves, those of others in our care and those encountered in fieldwork. These embodied relationships were particularly palpable through the impact of unplanned changes in the fieldwork phase of the project. The purpose of this paper is to show the intellectual and practical challenges of dealing with contingencies in a feminist postcolonial research project and the ways in which certain embodied relations are privileged, particularly presence versus absence. We show how intersectional theory and practice alleviated frictions between the materiality of bodies, while also retaining the imperatives of intellectual and relational solidarity and integrity. This underlines the critical importance of a generous embodied feminist politics underpinned by intersectional thinking.

Keywords:

Feminist methodology; intersectionality; embodiment; collaborative research; friendship; Pacific; feminist politics

Introduction

Collaborative feminist research is an intellectual and political practice that has long invited close examination for the ways in which knowledge is produced and power differentials are mediated (England 1994; Nagar 2003; Nagar and Geiger 2007). There is increasing scrutiny of complex research relationships (e.g. Gibson-Graham 1994; Hapke and Ayyenkeril 2001; Kobayashi 2003; Sultana

2012; Cuomo and Massaro 2016, Jokinen and Caretta 2016). We seek to extend this examination of complex research relationships by discussing our responses to changes in the planned research as feminist colleagues who share an intellectual project and work with a feminist ethics of care but who did not share in the embodied practice of planned 'joint fieldwork.' Just as Billo and Hiemstra draw on accounts of their own PhD research projects to examine how 'the researcher's personal and field life bleed into each other to shape the conduct of research' (2013: 315), so we ask how such 'bleeding' is also affected by our embodied relations and how these in turn effect the conduct of analysis. To do this we return to a consideration embodiment, what it meant in our 'joint' fieldwork and how intersectional thinking worked to refine the conceptual framing and practice of our research. Intersectionality facilitates recognition and appreciation of difference, including different embodiment, and this paper, and indeed our broader research project, is founded on a postcolonial politics of difference. One of the effects of differently embodied research is differently embodied methods. Our paper helps in the methodological refinement of embodied intersectional research by accounting for the physical presence of various dimensions of the body and multiple bodies, of the researchers, those in their care, their research 'subjects' and those in the environ. It also brings a consideration of the absence of the body and the impact of this absence on feminist methodological practice.

Research practices and knowledge-building processes are never taken for granted and considerable care is given to ensuring that apparently mundane acts are noticed and the particularities of embodied presence are not overlooked (Longhurst et al. 2008). This is because the close attention given to what is often 'taken-for-granted' allows for the examination of new ontologies. This in turn throws light on the array of epistemological framings of everyday life. It is here that feminist collaborative research overlaps with postcolonial investigation and knowledge production. These dual drivers informed the collaborative research project that the two authors jointly conceived of, designed and participated in. The research pivoted on collaboration throughout the project, including in the fieldwork phase. When one of us was unexpectedly unable to participate in 'joint

fieldwork', other methods of engagement became even more critical, such as conversation, reflection and the use of visual aids. This paper highlights the entanglements of embodied, emotive, practical and political issues involved where the privileging of proximate embodied research becomes apparent. This privileging has the potential to diminish the critical importance of shared intellectual frameworks and shared feminist politics. Without dismissing the value of having particular kinds of bodies 'in the field' – inscribed variously for instance by gender, race, or educational status (see Faria and Mollet 2016) – we argue that it is important to interrogate the embodied and intellectual anxieties and discomforts of presence and absence in 'joint' fieldwork. Moreover, with the benefit of sometimes uncomfortable reflective practices (Pillow 2003), an enhanced methodological process emerged which provides important insights into the ongoing substantive research questions – in our case into women market vendors in the Pacific.

The tensions between the emotions and intellect circulate in the innermost spaces of feminist research (Smith 2016; Billo and Hiemstra 2013). On the one hand, there is recognition of the value associated with the added insight that comes from the embodied and emotive relationships that develop with research 'subjects' or participants. This is especially palpable when the research engagement is at a distance from the every-day life of the researchers. On the other hand, there is a clear appreciation that researchers are also positioned in their own personal networks. This means that they are 'subject' to, or participate in, obligations and the associated emotions that can occur at a time that can be inconvenient for research plans. The obligation to care and be responsible to one's collaborative research project and to one's intimate networks is thus tested (Katz 1994).

In this article, we examine the intellectual, embodied, emotional, political and practical problematics that we faced in such a situation. In doing this, we engage with the notion of embodied subjectivities (Longhurst et al. 2008) and scholarship on feminist postcolonial collaborative research (Nagar 2014; Chowdhury et al. 2016). We draw this scholarship together by thinking from an

intersectional perspective because its intellectual coherence enables us to navigate the embodied and interlinked messiness of practical engagement and sharpens our shared and individual political projects. We embrace the contingencies of research practices as another intersecting and often unsettling dynamic in diverse and gendered worlds. And rather than dismissing such contingences, we argue for the rigorous and reflective analysis of their effects

Behind this methodological analysis sits a deeper concern, beyond the immediate scope of this paper; this is around the need to provide alternative development policy narratives to those that cast the emergent entrepreneurial features of women market vendors as evidence of a desire to participate in capitalist economic practices (B et al. 2014). We are ultimately interested in surfacing more diverse narratives that take into consideration other impulses behind particular economic practices and political sensibilities such as those that emanate from commitments to gifting, caring and protecting. This is not, however, the focus of this paper, but of the research project from which these questions of embodied affects and relationships emerged.

The paper begins with engagement of the embodied nature of research and research collaboration, between the researchers themselves rather than between researcher and research subject. It then turns to the collaborative relationship shared by the researchers, before consideration of the role played by intersectionality in our research and collaborative relationship. We outline the wider research setting or context, the project that brought to light the embodied nature of our research relationship and the roles of physical presence and absence, before we turn in the paper to our own narratives of our collaboration in the context of significant changes to the planned research project. The paper ends with an examination of our negotiation of contingencies and particularly of presence/absence and embodiment for our working of a feminist intersectional methodology in our wider research collaboration.

Embodied Subjectivities

This paper builds on thinking about embodied subjectivities (Longhurst et al. 2008) by reflecting on the possibilities for and tensions of collaborative research involving two feminist scholars working in the broad area of critical development studies. In any fieldwork process, researchers embody a range of subjectivities, many of which we are unaware of. When fieldwork happens in places that are new or unfamiliar, the embodied characteristics of the researcher will pivot on many and various features. Some may be obvious: like one's gender, age, race, height, clothes style, or language proficiency. Others are more subtle, like skin hue, accent, or hair texture. For instance, during one joint visit to an island in the Pacific people variably said to us, 'Oh, you are researchers from Australia/New Zealand – we thought you were tourists/the new teachers/missionaries etc. from Europe'. As researchers, we navigate these subjectivities in ways that ultimately seek to moderate vast differences in power and illuminate commonalities which ultimately can strengthen research relationships and thereby provide more coherent insights. The reverse process also occurs when researchers create subjectivities of their participants based on their embodied features or actions, for instance, in considering women who are selling produce at markets in the Pacific as 'grower-sellers' rather than possibly as 'wage-earners', or 'unpaid helpers'. It is a dynamic process which our feminist postcolonial collaborative research challenges by explicitly dealing with the embodied subjectivity of presence being the privileged ground of qualitative truth claims (Crang 2003: 500).

Collaborative research

The spaces and power structures of collaborative research remains a critical site for the interrogation of feminist postcolonial knowledge making (Cave et al. 2012; Wright et al. 2012; Chowdhury et. al. 2016). Various forms of collaboration are emerging, for instance, with diaspora (Pratt 2010), indigenous peoples (Wright et al. 2012), and research assistants (Turner 2013). Further, scholarship that makes explicit the negotiation of power dynamics between differently positioned researchers in a collaborative project is emerging (McGregor et al 2014). However, less is explicitly written about the processes of power sharing

between feminist scholars who purposely seek to challenge inequities, yet where inequities in the ability of both to participate in research processes in an expected present embodied manner arise due to the contingencies of care responsibilities.

It has long been acknowledged that contradictions or gaps between the research design and the actual process are to be expected (Gustafson 2000: 718).

However, it is also argued that feminist collaborative research ‘embodies a dynamic concern for the kind of knowledge produced (knowledge that is woman centered and transformative) and a concern for how that knowledge is produced (emerging from a partnership with peers working to uncover, clarify, and negotiate meaning through critical reflection, discussion, and reciprocity)’ (Gustafson 2000: 718). There is also an emerging consensus that flexibility is important in fieldwork (Billo and Hiemstra 2013). But when difficulties and contradictions emerge, there is too a need to reconfigure collaborative projects. A negotiated partnership between researchers and research subjects involves time, trust and openness. The relationship building here also involves already contingent practices such as engagement in each other’s teaching, in co-habitation of institutional space, and in the very conception of the research project.

We began our research collaboration from a shared intellectual feminist space. This shared space became quickly evident when we first met over ten years ago, sharing stories of feminist activist engagement and our commitment to feminist praxis in our work and daily lives. Our joint supervisions and teaching consolidated our shared intellectual analysis and practice and a quick and firm friendship emerged. Indeed, this friendship afforded us the space to converse about feminism and feminist praxis, beyond only the academy (De Leeuw et al. 2012). As we moved around the Pacific for personal reasons and as part of other research and political projects, we became increasingly concerned about the neoliberalisation of marketplace development in the Pacific (B et al. 2014). We decided to try to better understand the diverse economic practices and critical citizenship amongst women in four marketplaces in the Pacific, all of which one

or both of us was familiar with. We committed to being equal co-investigators in this collaborative project. It was this research project that provides the context to this paper.

As we examined our research practice and in particular how we took into consideration the materiality of the 'body' – its racialized markings, its sizeable subtleties, its affective sensibilities, we asked to what extent can notions of collaborative intersectionality (Cho et al. 2013), multiple difference (Yuval-Davis 2006), and unmarked intersectionality (Paulson 2016) be brought to bear in this consideration? We examine this question by thinking about the effect of the materiality of different bodies; our own bodies; those of the women, men and children in markets who were the focus of our research; and the bodies of our loved ones whose materiality was more palpable than we initially imagined. We also consider the affect of embodiment in our research: the feelings of connectiveness from relationships that are made through physical contact; the challenges that come from absence and our thinking of embodied presence and absence; the feelings of detachment when research is performed at a distance; and the anxieties around and/or acceptance of the asymmetrical and different natures of knowledge production in a feminist collaborative project.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a core concept in our research and teaching which means we take seriously the interconnected nature of positionality, knowledge and justice (Nagar et al. 2005). These features underpinned our research processes and guided us when our plans radically changed – that is, when one of us could not physically participate in a second fieldwork trip that involved three weeks interviewing women market vendors in Samoa, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. Our project examined the role played by gender for these women participants but also, vitally, in keeping with an intersectional and postcolonial approach, other categories of difference including ethnicity, age, socio-economic status and class, place, indigeneity, dis/ability, migration status and sexuality (Gustafson 2000: 727; see also Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983; Brah and Phoenix 2004; Collins 1998; Crenshaw 1989; Mohanty 1986; Spivak 1988; Valentine

2007). We work with intersectionality ontologically and as a methodological tool and this means an explicit process of recognising and working with embodied, cultural, social and political differences of ourselves as well as of our participants. We are guided by the argument that intersectionality as methodology goes beyond variables, or categories of difference and instead:

it adopts a distinctive stance, emanates from a specific angle of vision, and, most crucially, embodies a particular dynamic approach to the underlying laws of motion of the reality it traces and traps while remaining grounded in the experiences of classes of people within hierarchical relations “where systems of race, gender, and class domination converge,” criticizing rigidly top-down social and political order from the perspective of the bottom up (Crenshaw 1991b: 1246)(Mackinnon 2013: 1020) .

We sought to dislodge and move beyond a simple and universalised notion of women and women’s experiences, such as that which characterises and animates the predominant development policy focus on urban-centred ‘women market vendors’ in the Pacific. To do this, we placed colonial and postcolonial productions of power at the forefront of our considerations of economic and political practices in and around marketplaces and women’s shaping of these practices. We also needed to do this in our methodology which meant paying attention to our embodied presence, co-presence or absence. Following Mohanty (2013), in our study of market vendors in the Pacific, our interest in ensuring greater attention is paid ‘to historical and cultural specificity in understanding their complex agency as situated subjects’ (2013: 967) required us to consider our agency as well. In the larger project, our observational and interview methodology is supplemented by a broader postcolonial feminist analysis of the gendered challenges in women’s lives. Part of that requires us to interrogate our own lives and relationships, and the intersections between these and research processes.

Research Context

Our larger research project examines the ways in which women in the Pacific engage concurrently in political life and diverse economic practices. The project focuses on everyday activities in and around marketplaces across four Pacific countries in four regional and outer island markets: Munda (Solomon Islands), Salelologa (Samoa), Aitutaki (Cook Islands) and Tufi (Papua New Guinea). We argue that a multi-sited analysis offers insights into the diversity of relationships between economic practices, political participation and gender inequality in the Pacific. Central to this project, funded by a two-year university research grant, are also methodological concerns - what are the appropriate methodologies to investigate women's economic and political lives in and around marketplaces in 'out-of-the-way' places, that is, where the 'centre' is understood as a relative term not an essential one (Tsing 1993, X 2001).

Our interest in learning more about marketplaces and in particular the economic and political participation of mostly women vendors in and around marketplaces where they trade, collaborate, govern, and socialise emerged in response to the growing focus on marketplaces in the Pacific as triple win development interventions: for the women vendors who can transform into the entrepreneurial individual who looks after herself and her family; for the market managers who reap the financial benefits of high levies on market vendors; and for governments whose reneging on economic security for those in the informal economy, allows women to pick up their responsibility (X et al. 2012). Our intent was to talk with women in a variety of different markets throughout the Pacific and to listen to their stories, their ideas of the economic and political processes that affect their lives and their understanding of relations between men and women. We designed semi-structured interview questions and imagined undertaking more than one interview with individual women, as well as group interviews if participants were more comfortable sharing their stories collectively.ⁱⁱ The research design intended for both researchers to be physically present, together, in the marketplaces and to conduct the interviews both together and separately, and to work with translators as necessary. It was a methodological approach based wholly on embodied physical co-presence.

We broke our fieldwork into two trips, one to Aitutaki, Cook Islands, that we jointly undertook in September 2015 and the longer one, to the other islands, undertaken at the end of the teaching semester in November 2015. The trip to Aitutaki was always planned as a precursor fieldwork research trip. B (for purpose of review) is from the Cook Islands, though not from the island of Aitutaki, and had visited Aitutaki a couple of times before. She also has a close cousin living on the island. Although not fluent in Cook Island Maori, B has cognitive comfort and met people she had known from the past, as well as her own family members. X (for purpose of review) is from Australia, of German heritage, and it was her first visit to both Cook Islands and Aitutaki. She is comfortable, however, in a Pacific island environment, having worked in Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Fiji.

We have travelled together in Papua New Guinea, Brazil and New Zealand so are familiar with how our particular joint embodiment is part of the research experience. When seen together, we present as two 'large' white-ish women: X is nearly six foot three and B is about 5 foot 10, and while B has an olive complexion and fair hair, X is fairer, with blonde hair. In Aitutaki, we were clearly marked as visitors to the tourism-oriented island of just over 2000 people. Regulars to the market recognised us as newcomers and responded with polite conversations and gradual familiarity as we explained our research. They also responded to our embodied presence. For instance, the weekend market manager seemed to take comfort in the fact that X was about the same height as she was, and B was recognised by a regular market vendor as a Cook Island researcher who had undertaken research on a different island almost a decade earlier. We worked hard to ease people to our presence, by hanging around on the edges of the internal market room, dressing casually, taking interest in the different produce on the shelves and being helpful where possible to the market manager so that vendors and visitors could observe routine market business. For some, the daily market business also involved socialising, including with us. On the first day we just observed and engaged in small talk and in general learnt what we could about the market layout, the weekly routines and key people involved in managing the market. We also bought some produce for our own

meals, and sometimes exchanged food preparation ideas. Since this was a small market, it operated more as a co-operative with produce growers and food sellers dropping their sales off in the morning and later in the day picking up the money from their sales as well as any unsold perishables. The market manager recorded all transactions, calculated what vendors received and made daily bank deposits. For this, she was paid a salary.

This brief insight from one of the field sites provides a sense of the embodied nature of our original research plans, that our presence in the marketplaces was an assumed backdrop of our research design, as was the navigation of this physical presence, its effects and the impact on and with our research collaborators (see, for example, Faria and Mollett 2016: 82). The nature of the research itself, any so-called findings, and our engagement with our research 'subjects', the women market vendors whose lives and work inspired the collaborative project, while not the focus of this paper, cannot be completely ignored because of the embodied relationships that were built on between the researchers themselves and those that developed with the vendors and market participants.

At the end of each day we would share our initial thoughts on how the research 'findings' were emerging, plan for the next day and check in with each other's bodily comfort mostly around sleep, rest, and food. Over the seven days on the island, we happily shared accommodation space, enjoyed shared work time, shared down time as colleagues but importantly too as friends, as well as alone time, such as swimming or reading. We were comfortable with this and expected the second, longer trip would proceed in the same manner. Part of this close living and working arrangement allowed us to exercise a feminist ethics of care as we both had close family members elsewhere who we needed to keep in touch with over the week. Further, it challenged our postcolonial thinking around ensuring we were not seeking truths or triangulating. Finally, it allowed us to work with our own intersectional embodiments. We shared stories in the social space of the evenings but also as a reaction to our experiences each day in the market, of our bodily histories ('when I was a teenager stories'), our sized body

(‘when I am the tallest in the room’) and differently coloured bodies (‘when I am not recognised as a D ’).

One of the things that became apparent during our daily de-briefings was the importance of recognising differences in our interpretations of our research. An example was how to assess the relative value of young drinking coconuts, a key item sold at the market. Trying to guess the pricing schemes employed by local vendors, X assumed that the larger ones were best because of their relatively higher price, but in contrast B understood this as a way to appeal to the tourist market and that smaller, cheaper ones often provided the sweetest coconut water. Our daily debriefs were a vital part of our feminist research engagement, allowing for us to collectively disentangle our different interpretations of daily life and the day’s research activities. The physical proximity – being in the same research site at the same time - facilitated the co-work that advanced our intellectual project.

We began to also look at ways in which our research practices were gendered, aged, and racialized and what embodied and disembodied research might look like. It did matter how we talked (i.e., in English, as academics) and what we looked like. Our body shapes and sizes, our skin colour, marked us in particular ways – the aural and visual signs do make a difference. One of the most fundamental of these markers, however, was less in our physicality but more in our ‘privileged’ presence. That is, that we were able to travel to Aitutaki (and later to three other sites) to learn about the dynamics of the market place and women’s interactions in these sites.

We worked hard to plan the next stage of the fieldwork, with the eventual travel schedule including a leg that left Samoa at 2am and arrived in Munda, Solomon Islands, 15 hours later. This is the nature of Pacific research. Personal challenges also presented themselves along the way. We had real difficulty making time to travel away from family, with one of us trying to schedule fertility treatment and the other parenting adult children with their own needs.

Nonetheless, the Aitutaki fieldwork provided us with a good understanding of

how our time in the other places would unfold and we worked towards the second phase of fieldwork in November 2015.

Contingencies and complexities

Our travel, indeed the research project as a whole, was carefully planned around these challenges consistent with our commitment to postcolonial feminism informed by intersectionality. This commitment translated into a methodological one, leveraged on notions of embodiment and intersectionality. However, embodiment came to mean more than we thought it would. To fully understand how this works in 'joint' research, a diversion from the joint narrative is instructive (Nagar 2014). In the next section, X and B discuss their differently embodied experiences of negotiating the fieldwork. We then converge with a narrative that demonstrates the importance of sharing an intellectual framework that accommodates diverse positionalities, differently embodied participation in the field, the co-production of knowledge and the unexpected role contingency came to play in this research.

X

I was already uneasy about the schedule of travel, coming off an incredibly hectic period of work, leaving the day after I had finished my large load of exam marking. We considered various scenarios, perhaps, for example, that I would travel a little later after my exam marking, but in the end remained firm in our commitment to travel together. B had the benefit of having visited Salelologa, Samoa, our first stop, a couple of times before so she was better able to imagine the journey that involved a ferry trip in the early hours of the morning.

Things changed slightly the week before the planned travel when I learned that my much beloved and elderly grandparents in Melbourne were facing a health and care crisis. After much anguish and discussion, B and I agreed that rather than travelling to Samoa, I would travel to Melbourne and help to care for my grandparents for a week and then catch up with B in the Solomon Islands – where I had travelled before. However, things changed more radically once again, when the day before our mutual departures, my partner was diagnosed

with acute heart disease and was told emergency heart bypass surgery was needed. So, for the second time in days, my travel plans completely changed and I remained in Auckland to care full-time for my critically ill partner for the next two months. I continued to worry about my grandparents and tried to put contingency arrangements in place from a distance; I have a large extended family and thankfully they were well cared for. My partner's heart emergency became my sole focus and, I believe, necessarily so. Meanwhile B left Auckland to undertake the three country fieldwork on her own.

After my partner's admission to the emergency department at Auckland's general hospital, with his condition escalating from something that could be scheduled in the near future to an immediate coronary crisis, I waited with my partner each day to hear when his surgery would be scheduled. His condition was deteriorating rapidly and it was an incredibly stressful period; my care response was to attempt to alleviate his concerns. Part of this involved spending very long days with him in the hospital. I would arrive home each night at 10pm and have something to eat and address my fears in full. Neither my partner nor I have immediate or extended family in New Zealand, though we do have the support of friends. The physicality of relations, however, was brought into stark relief by my attempts to convey news to my partner's concerned family in Scotland and in a demonstration of circles and relationships of care, my mother, who had been in full care mode of her own parents, flew to Auckland to care for both me and my partner. She waited for me at the end of each day for an update and debrief. The day my partner was admitted to emergency, as we waited for him to be stable enough for the necessary bypass surgery, I negotiated immediate carer's leave with my manager and put on an out-of-office notification on my work email. For perhaps the first time in my academic career, I adhered to this and in fact thought very little of work. This extended to the research project, though not to how B, as a colleague and friend, was faring.

The centrality of our feminist ethics and praxis of care to our research was therefore brought into sharp relief with our feminism as played out in our intimate lives as partners and grandchildren and our commitment to one

another as friends. B and I had set up the fieldwork up as a joint project. It certainly felt strange, disappointing and sad to not embark on the fieldwork together. However, my primary focus was my partner's health and his subsequent recovery after the life-saving surgery. B and I committed to staying in touch as best as we could, recognising the logistical difficulties with two of the three locations best described as very remote and off-grid but we perhaps did not take account of how preoccupied I would be and the long hours I would be out of contact, as well as these logistical telecommunications challenges.

B

In the planning of the fieldwork, I became aware of the difficulties that we would face travelling to three remote places immediately after a busy teaching semester. The timing of the fieldwork was scheduled in the first non-teaching week and although we discussed delaying the fieldwork by a week, X had special prearranged leave that could not be shifted. I felt better able to embark on the travel schedule because I did not have the pressure of marking a huge number of examination scripts a few days before we left. I had also visited two of the three locations before so had a good idea of what to expect – including how it felt when travel began at 3am and daily temperatures were in the 30s/80s. However, as the semester progressed, I could sense rising levels of anxiety from X as pressures of work became increasingly apparent.

Nonetheless, we kept our fingers on each other's pulse and discussed the option of X joining me at the second location. When X got the news about her grandparents, the emotional landscape changed and it was clear that she needed to contribute to their care. This made the option of her joining me in Solomon Islands more practical. I was very comfortable undertaking the fieldwork alone in Samoa and there was a sense of relief because I knew that X would not need to deal with the tropical heat (without air conditioning), the ferry journey and the 3am start for the journey from Salelologa in Samoa, to Munda in the Solomon Islands.

Things changed again, however, and aside from the shock of hearing about X's partner, the thought of undertaking the fieldwork completely on my own left me with some disquiet. How would I manage not having the important daily debriefing and reflexive conversations that had marked our intellectual engagement and planning to date? How would I deal with the loneliness that comes with fieldwork in places that are not one's home? How would I explain to people that this was a joint research project when I was on my own? How could I capture and share the fieldwork relationships I knew I would develop?

There was no time to change travel plans. X and I agreed to keep in touch and ambitiously planned that she would 'interview' me by phone each day as a way to say engaged in the fieldwork we had worked so hard to plan. Unsurprisingly, X was completely consumed with caring for her partner and I was determined not to add any further stress to her disappointment that she would not be able to be part of any of this research.

In the end I dealt with the 'going on my own' in various planned and unforeseen ways: in Samoa I had daily phone calls with a colleague based in Suva but who was from Salelologa; en route to Solomon Islands, by chance I had the fortune of travelling with two colleagues; and in Papua New Guinea, my sister-in-law joined me for the entirety of the fieldwork and then we both travelled home to our village for a couple of days before I started the journey back to New Zealand. Further, I had the good luck of being in transit, both in Honiara and Port Moresby, at the same time as other good research colleagues. Together these chance encounters, which is a recognised mark of Pacific travel (Hau'ofa 1994), provided the necessary reflective conversations, something similar to which I would have had with X. But what did this mean for our 'joint research' and commitment to postcolonial feminist scholarship?

Negotiating the contingencies

The realisation that X would not be completing the rest of the fieldwork, after Aitutaki, as planned was unsettling for both of us. B was comfortable travelling on her own as she was familiar with the markets in Samoa and PNG and was

curious about visiting another part of the Pacific, Munda in Solomon Islands, that X had been to and worked in already. But B also experienced the sudden loneliness that comes with such travel, especially after our joint planning efforts and imagining the trip together. X meanwhile had feelings of guilt and sadness and worry, though often pushed far aside as she was worrying so much about her partner's health.

For B, the fieldwork period was intense. She worked with local women in each location as translators and undertook interviews in and around the marketplaces in each location. More than these interviews, however, B also engaged in informal conversations, met many people, ate and laughed with them, watched and observed the diverse activities of marketeers and their customers, as well as the market governors. Her bodily presence shifted in the marketplaces from initially being a source of curiosity - where are you from, what are you doing, where are you staying - to a source of knowledge - what did that person say, where did you buy that, how was that coconut, when are you coming back. She did not feel physically out of place in Salelologa, for example, because she was also of Pacific heritage so shared embodied features like bodily size and skin tone with Samoan women. But her embodied subjectivity placed her out of place with everyone talking about the fact that she was not at the market to do what everyone else was doing, that is buying, selling and socialising. Her status as researcher marked her. In contrast as a first time visitor to Munda and not sharing physically features with Munda women, who were of small build and had dark brown skin, B felt very different. However, she was quickly made to feel comfortable in the bustling and diverse marketplace, due in large part to the close relationship she developed with a research assistant who was also a market vendor. B's embodiment became mediated by that of another woman, one who passed readily in the Munda marketplace due to familiarity but also the intimate reading of others, including research participants, of ethnicity, gender, skin and hair colour, height, and age. B's embodiment as a relatively tall, fair-skinned woman, shared by some other market goers but certainly not the majority, did not seem to draw the same obvious attention as it had in Salelologa,

perhaps because of a greater frequency of visitors of embodied difference to the Munda market or perhaps because it was a busier market.

These are some of the affects of being in the field; a question for us is how we can share these intangible experiences when only one of us directly, physically experienced them. We share interview recordings and transcriptions and we talk through the physical and emotional affects. B also knows that X has done similar fieldwork research elsewhere, and therefore she can imagine that X too would have been both comfortable and yet out of place – her physicality so immediately different from that of the majority in all fieldsites. The intersectional positionality behind this cannot be ignored but instead must be acknowledged and worked with so that postcolonial knowledge hierarchies can change (see, for example Schurr and Segebart 2012; Sundberg 2005; Tuhiwai Smith 1999). Mullings (1999: 339), in Schurr and Segebart (2012: 150), argues that feminist researchers need to grapple with the multiple ways in which knowledge production is shaped by ‘positions of power due to their [the researcher’s and the research partners’] position within specific gender, class, or racial hierarchies.’

These positionings have been at the forefront of our engagement, as individual and collective researchers, in research work with participants. We are aware that we might have looked like an odd/curious/even formidable couple – two tall women, one white, one olive-skinned, asking questions in the market but only doing ‘small’ shopping. We sought to immediately recognise and dispel as much as possible the power dynamics that can come from such a positioning – two white-ish academic women researching the developmental ‘other.’ We did this by recognising our different embodiment, by speaking openly about our conspicuousness with research participants and market attendees; by choosing to conduct research in sites that we were familiar with and where we could interact with market vendors and attendees with at least basic greetings; and by overcoming lack of language skills by working with local women as translators and intermediaries.

The methodology and intellectual practice behind our project was greater than the fieldwork trips. The field is constituted, however, through practice and with one of us absent, we have faced ongoing questions about how to make meaningful connections with the knowledge gained and the knowledge yet to be gained. The project has therefore become about engagement with absence and recognition that 'absence is experienced and that it arises only, and without exception, in lived experience' (Meier et al. 2013: 424). We have come to treat absence therefore not as a void but another presence in our research, a feature just as vivid and animating as the choice of field sites. At the same time, B was also engaged with women in Salelologa, Munda and Tufi and inevitably they co-produced knowledge without X – co-presence made a difference. Certainly, this knowledge co-production was an intended and desired part of the methodological approach. In a further manifestation of the research project, with longer and dual participation of both researchers, this relationship between researchers and participants would ideally be furthered and could include greater negotiation and participation opportunities for participants around research questions, activities and outputs and essential dialogic solidarity (see, for example, Gustafson 2000: 730; Kapoor 2005; Schurr and Segebart 2012).

Overcoming absence via transcripts and photos

When X first began engaging with the recordings and transcripts of the interviews B conducted and the photographs B took at the various sites, she assumed that she would simply be doing some sort of 'intellectual' analysis of these documents. Initially, she assumed that this analysis, a reading of the documents at face value to then undertake qualitative discourse analysis (see, for example, Lazar 2005), would reveal enough about the interviewees and their thoughts. However, X soon found that such a reading of the recordings, transcripts and photographs was insufficient and that she was left with many further questions. Having not participated in the interviews, but having co-formulated the research questions behind them, X wanted to know more about the mood of the interview and interviewee, and wondered how to interpret certain answers without having seen facial gestures or gesticulations, how to profile participants without seeing them and without having a great deal of

background information. Further, she realised that she did not know the perceived condition of the market sites themselves, how they smelt, whether there was adequate shelter and shade, if a breeze alleviated the heat, if the rubbish was collected regularly. Photos did surprisingly little to answer these questions, but certainly provided some additional context to the recordings and transcripts. They are, however, a static aid and mixing them with the recordings and transcripts continues to leave gaps.

One of the interesting dynamics that emerged in the reading or use of the fieldwork material is the management of expectations. The majority of the fieldwork component of this joint project clearly did not go as either collaborator planned and expectations continued to be built into the research process long after the joint fieldwork did not take place. One of these expectations was that the non-present collaborator, X, would be able to go beyond the immediate transcribed discourse. This was in part because the project had been conceived of so radically differently and also because this is not how she has worked in the past; transcripts were only a minor part of the toolbox because she had previously undertaken the interviews or at least been present during them. The transcripts from Aitutaki, for example, are so much richer than a textual recording of the interview, because both researchers acted as interviewers, both met the participants and both knew the context in which the interviews took place. Instead, with the interviews from Saleloga, Munda and Tufi, X was filled with questions for B about the context and this placed a further burden on B as the researcher who had been present in the field, as she was asked to convey details of people, places, sights, smells, sounds, sometimes long after the interviews had taken place. These question and answer sessions centred around fieldwork material, which we continue to pursue, are an essential practical methodological step – conversation acts to bridge the distance and gaps of the absent collaborator and animates anew, and differently, the fieldwork experiences of the present collaborator.

Another issue presented itself in the processes of post-fieldwork research negotiation and that is that the material reaching the non-present collaborator

came via a series of interveners, not only via the other collaborator. The transcripts, for example, were a recording of the interview undertaken usually by the present collaborator but sometimes by a translator and then were transcribed by a third party. There is an increasing sense of distance from this material and X had to work very hard with B to overcome this distance and the process is an ongoing one as they work through the research material. These practises are a pertinent reminder for both B and X that these series of collaborative and disjointedly collaborative methodological steps - the fieldwork, the undertaking of interviews, the soliciting of interviews and transcriptions, the taking and sharing of photographs – are only a component of the jointly conceived research project. These fieldwork-related methodological tools cannot be seen in isolation away from the wider project, nor in totality. They are essential to the original conception of the project – as a scoping project - and its goals of incorporating women market vendors' voices in an assessment of current policy direction for marketplaces in the Pacific but sit inside a larger whole. The task of reading the transcripts and connecting them to photographs taken and of interpreting the discourse of the transcripts continues then to be a joint, collaborative act and one that is done in conjunction with a wider understanding of the project.

Towards a conclusion: how does thinking and practicing intersectionality foster feminist postcolonial research

One way we have worked together through the methodological questions posed by the unexpected events around our fieldwork is to continue to work closely with our underpinning values, methodologies and frameworks, our commitments to postcolonial feminism and to intersectionality. Intersectionality as a concept allows us to see the possibilities of diverse and divergent flows of power. Recognition of the value of difference has helped us to navigate that when we are in the field, we will of course experience research differently. Moreover, there is no perfect set of knowledge that can be taken from any one place, so the process of sharing experiences and knowledge gained is ongoing and incomplete. Indeed our research, built on a jointly framed research project, is partial only and does not seek a whole truth or an expert's word on the lives of

others. It is a storytelling process, and this particular story will come from different threads woven together through different means and times.

We are constantly evaluating how we take this particular project forward as a postcolonial feminist project, remembering particularly the desire to work with women market vendors as the researchers themselves. Here, new questions are raised, including the ability of sourcing funds from a university-setting for such de-centred research and this invites close scrutiny of participatory action research, particularly done in physically distant contexts, when it is undertaken for a university as funder. The questions that emerged for us as collaborators, as colleagues, as friends have a bearing for the project more widely – how do issues of countering the privileging of presence in research play out in development research more broadly? Can we avoid or subvert this privileging of embodied presence, and did we by virtue of the circumstances we encountered and the contingencies we enacted? How can we better work with absence, given the privilege of presence, that it can be built on monetary access to travel, geographic proximity and the privileging of able bodies? What is the knowledge that we as collaborative researchers, working with a diverse body of women market vendors as collaborators, are trying to build, for whom and for what purpose? We will continue to use our privileged institutional position in a knowledge-building institution to probe these questions in our teaching, our advocacy, and our growth as colleagues/friends/collaborators.

In this paper, the intersecting intellectual and practical challenges that such contingencies bring to a feminist postcolonial research project are fully exposed. In doing so we argue that intersectional practice can alleviate frictions between the materiality of bodies and their tacit connections, with the imperatives of intellectual solidarity and direct links to integrity. This is made possible because of the ability to think about a generous embodied feminist politics which acknowledges the positioning of affect and intellect in different places and times. We also offer practical methodological tools for working with transcripts and photographs to provide the non-present fieldworker with an experience of the field. There are a range of embodied subjectivities in research which need

greater scrutiny in order to highlight the effect of power differentials in knowledge building projects.

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