



# I Came Out to My Father Through My Positionality Chapter: Reflections on Ethics and Risk

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## Abstract

What are the different risks queer scholars of color face in the field, and how can they evaluate these? Do queer researchers face similar risks in classrooms as they may in the field? In that case, while a queer researcher may be able to distance themselves from the field, would they have distance from the risk, discomfort, or harm caused in the field?

This is a creative nonfiction piece that draws on my experience of fieldwork in Hungary in the summer of 2022 and the process of writing my dissertation "Dancing Behind Closed Doors: Negotiating Queerness in Hungarian Traditional Dances" as an academic in mobility. The dissertation looks at how my interlocutors navigate and subvert modes of traditionally heteronormative dance transmission and choreography. Thus, as a queer AFAB researcher of color, I often dealt with exoticization and dysphoria as I participated in diverse dance spaces while living in a country where the government rhetoric is vocally anti-LGBTQ+ people. I look at safety not only as a physical assurance but also as an emotional assurance, and give importance to the affective impact of fear, shame, inadequacy, and otherness on one's work and wellbeing. Through this creative nonfiction piece, I enter into dialogue with myself and others as I try to make sense

of the process of my research and identify my needs—which may resonate with other queer researchers—to start a conversation around queering notions of what one can consider risk, harm, and safety as movement researchers.

In this essay, I work through my experiences from fieldwork and the classroom, looking at risks and harm that I was prepared for or immediately recognized and those which I identified retrospectively. I speak about facing ignorance in academia towards queerness, dysphoria, the danger around being out, and a lack of access to a queer social network and queer affirmative advising. I engage with the nuances of speaking about my positionality as a queer person and considering ethics beyond anonymity (of researchers and interlocutors) before entering the field, which are doubly important with queer academics of color, who often face danger if their identity becomes public on a familial, social, legal, and employment level. I also try to make sense of ways in which teaching and classroom learning (that hold the purpose of reflection, taking distance, and growth) are often heteronormative or homophobic and can shrink a queer scholar's imagination of queerness and queer possibilities.

**Keywords:** fieldwork, risk, ethics, queer affirmative teaching, classroom, home, Person of Color, POC

Ethics

Risk

Harm

Ethics

Risk

Harm

Thoughts

Experiences

Action

Forethought

Behavior

Preparation

Safety

Fear

Freeze

Fight

Curiosity

Other

Field

Discomfort

University

Class

Room

Bed

Apartment

Country

Home

Comfort

People

Community

Safety

## Prologue

An excerpt from “i wish I were two dogs then i could play with me (translator’s note on euripides’ bakkhai)” by Anne Carson. [Bold added by me.]

*What makes  
beginnings special?  
Think of*

*Your first sip of wine  
from a really good bottle.  
Opening page*

*of a crime novel*

**Start**

**of an idea**

*Tingle of falling in love*

*Beginnings have their own energy,*

**Ethics**

*Tonality,*

*Colour*

*Greenish-bluish-purple*

*Dewy and cool*

*Almost transparent*

*As a ripe grape*

*Tone of **alterity***

*Things just about to change*

*Already looking different*

**Energy headlong**

**And heedless**

*And shot*

*Like a beam. **Ethics***

**fantastically selfish.**

My ethnographic research started somewhere within me before I found it in Hungary. I was drawn to it because I saw the start of a process, the beginning of a scene, of people figuring out how they can negotiate their queer identities within their heteronormative traditional dance practices. Perhaps because I feel (and felt) stuck with my own dance practice. I feel that the aesthetic expectations of the form don't fit with how I would want to express myself. I feel like I'm in drag when I dance but with no scope for commentary. Perhaps that's why I wanted to see how "queer" dance emerges, especially socially. How it arrives. What is its process of becoming (queer)?

What makes us drawn to a topic of study, a community, or a practice? What makes us choose to write about it, or confident that we can? How do we describe or justify this interest to ourselves or our interlocutors? If community were truly at the center of today's anthropology, would the end product of research still look the way it does today—a thesis, book, or publication? Selfish ethics—not just that we are ethically selfish, that we act in our self-interest in ethical manners, but that our ethics in themselves serve us more than others. A terrifying thought, but then why does it ring so true? Energy headlong and heedless; we were thrown headfirst into the field. I suppose most fieldwork feels that way. When you find something that you want to think about and feel excited and curious about, everything seems possible and achievable. We were asked to draft consent forms and consider the risks of the research. We thought about risk in a way as if its purpose was to save face for the discipline or protect a university if a student were harmed. A heedless risk analysis, even more oxymoronic than selfish ethics? In most contexts, it is clear that the **start of** anthropology had fantastically selfish ethics. To survey, categorize, and analyze only to divide and rule. Because ethnography and anthropology have been used against people. And so now we say: do no harm. Underline it, so that we never forget that our research cannot come above people's wellbeing. But the institutions of education loom over them all. How much have we changed? Do we change?

**Alterity**—"otherness"—"the state of being other." Merriam-Webster says, "Specifically the quality or state of being radically alien to the

conscious self or particular cultural orientation.” Our interpretation of alterity is where ethics began, isn’t it? Having seen the other as alien to us. Rather than us as alien to the other. An anthropologist sees others as other, as different to themselves. Queer people often see themselves as different to others. If binaries were my thing, I’d say these are at odds with one another. Different alterities, yet alterity all the same. The relational and relative nature of otherness and its impacts on people have become inseparable from ethics and risk in my understanding. Aren’t ethics and risk ultimately impacted by power dynamics? Dynamic power dynamics, that can change in a split second, need to be constantly negotiated, and considered as research is conducted. How do I hold them all?

But my experience is that ethics that consider the community are in practice, in our approaches and actions. For a researcher to be ethical, ethics need to be more than forms and definitions, perhaps even more than guidelines. Ethics are a way of research that we all negotiate and develop with our respective fields and communities. And this negotiation often involves the needs of both parties.

This is a Monologue.

More like a ramble. A stream of consciousness.

A compilation of soliloquies and asides (does this make it more credible?)

I say it to myself,

as I look at me in the mirror.

I hope...that there is someone on the other side

But I’m too embarrassed to actually read this to someone else,  
even afraid?

I feel ridiculous.

ashamed.

After all,

I am an anthropologist.

And a good anthropologist is invincible,  
interlocutors before themselves. always.

I was at a workshop.

We were given 10 minutes to write a poem based on some images handed to us. Even in a stream of consciousness poem, the anthropologist in the room (not me) spoke of her interlocutors. Most people didn't even think of their kids, or parents, or dogs, or lovers.

So that must mean,

It's me.

I'm being bad.

Selfish.

Very bad.

I must change.

But the past remains.

I came out to my father through my positionality chapter

A thing among many that I cannot change.

### **I came out to my father through my positionality chapter: reflections on ethics and risk in the classroom**

Have you ever just forgotten that you are queer?

Or for the straight reader, forgotten that you are straight? Or realized that you're straight?

I know it's a weird question, perhaps to some, even a peculiar one... but it's one many of my friends related to when I told them that sometimes, in mundane moments, I forget I am queer.

In one such moment, when my identity was not on my mind (~~What does it mean to not have identity on one's mind? When does this happen? Which identities are on our minds and when, where, why, and how do they appear?~~), I sent my dissertation draft to my father. I was exhausted and he was being so present and helpful asking me to back up all my pages. What's the big deal? Sending a dissertation to one's parents doesn't sound all that dramatic. However, I had not come out to my father, and my dissertation, in my positionality chapter, did state that I am a queer researcher. And so, inadvertently, I came out to my father through my positionality chapter.

Exactly what happened that day is maybe a story for later. My research looked at ways in which LGBTQ+ Hungarian Folk Dancers in Hungary navigated their “queerness” in their traditional dance practice. Almost everyone knew that I was working with LGBTQ+ people. Not everyone knew that I am part of the LGBTQ+ community. One of the things I learned from this accident is that hiding my queerness feels like having to hide myself. Not just censor some parts, but to show as little of myself as possible to those who shouldn’t know. Because mishaps happen. Because I am queer even when I am not doing something “queer.”

## **A Memory**

I’m 14 years old.

We all stood in a circle. Young teens in a summer drama course.

Drama teacher: “Now...fear.”

We had to go one by one. Enact fear. Not just show the emotion, but act out an instance which helps us perform that emotion. One by one we took to the center. I remember that most of us, including me, enacted a scene where we were under some kind of threat.

An imaginary robber was robbing us,

An imaginary gun was pointed at us,

An imaginary gun was being held by us,

An imaginary person was chasing us...

Our bodies took on many postures to show this fear: arms in the air in surrender, palms shivering, bodies crouching, cowering, balling up, retreating, crawling, faces pleading, crying, in shock.

And then there was this one kid. On his turn, he walked into the center. He started searching for something in an imaginary bag.

First slowly, moving imaginary items around in the imaginary bag.

Then slightly faster, then much faster.

These imaginary items started getting taken out in a frenzy.

Panic then turned to fear.



In the end, he just stood there, without having found the item he was searching for, barely moving in space. In fact, he was the one whose movements took up next to no floor space.

Frozen

Drama teacher: [Profuse praise.]

I don't remember what she said, but through blurry memory, I remember that she spoke after his performance, which she didn't do after anyone else's. I also remember how her posture changed. Her still observation transformed into excitement as her body gesticulated her compliments. I remember her praise was critical, delivered with notes she wanted us all to reflect on. I also remember the impact of his performance on me. I had been so focused on performing fear perfectly, that I never gave thought to performing it honestly. I performed a version of the emotion I had seen in thrillers and horror movies. A version that required less introspection and vulnerability.

I performed fears I had never experienced. But they lived in my head. I was told to beware of intruders, strangers, robbers, and assaulters. Basically, people who do bad things. Perhaps I was performing a situation I feared would happen or a situation in which my fear would go unquestioned.

But...

Who hasn't experienced panic and fear around a forgotten or lost item? Who hasn't had to contend with the consequences of such an event? Even today I remember wondering why I couldn't think about moments of fear in my everyday life. The fear of a monster hiding in my closet, the fear of walking through the house in the dead of the night, the fear of not knowing the answer to a question in class, the fear of being a disappointment, the fear of failure, the fear of getting hurt (physically, emotionally), the fear of being on the receiving end of hurtful comments, actions, and even rage.

## **An Aside**

When I was doing fieldwork in Hungary, in the last week of being there, I was stalked by two construction workers who were renovating the apartment in front of mine. As a friend and I drank coffee, sitting on the chairs outside the main door of my apartment, they came up to us and tried to talk to us. They realized that we didn't speak Hungarian, so they used gestures and a few English words to communicate. They repeated swear words like *Fuck* and gestured at us and then themselves. They must have heard us have sex the previous night and were propositioning us, asking for a foursome. We asked them to leave a few times, but they wouldn't. I worried things would get heated and with them standing at my door, the two of us went into the house and locked the door. I immediately went into my room and shut the windows, and drew the curtains shut, which we had opened to let sunlight in in the morning. Both of us got dressed, peeked through the window to see if the men were indoors, and went to a café to have a coffee. I was feeling unsafe, paranoid, and grateful that I only had another week in this apartment, where now I had to live with the windows shut and drawn in the blistering Hungarian summer. The men continued to stare, try to peek through windows, and wait at the front door to look at me. Had I not had flatmates and her company for that week, I'm sure I would've had to move out and find another place. I didn't feel like I could tell most of my professors. When I told my supervisor, I found the conversation rather awkward. He wasn't unkind; I just felt like we didn't know how to talk to each other about this. I didn't know how to feel then, and I still don't know how to feel now—apart from being glad that in the end, I kept myself safe.

One professor asked me: What would you have wanted your supervisor or the program to do?

I said, I'm not an expert and I'm sure there are people better equipped to provide solutions and guidelines. But saying something like, "I'm sorry you experienced this," is a good start.

To demand from a student that they separate science and experience is rooted in colonial thinking. Experiences, in my opinion, are constantly

shaping the way we form and situate knowledge. Have we ever considered that racism in anthropological writing of the beginning of the 20th century may have come from the new risks researchers faced in the field—unprepared—and their raw reactions to alterity led to interpretations that we now know as racist? Field research was an essential development of the discipline but one who's conflicts we still do not understand in much nuance; this is a shortcoming that in my view anthropology has yet to address and contend with. My experiences of queerness and race are diverse, for they are impacted by various contexts, and thus my understanding of these concepts is molded by this multiplicity. This complicates the binary construction of some concepts like field and home, or insider and outsider. As a person of color, I was told, even in the field, that Hungary was much safer for queer people than India. It led me to believe that, in Europe, we were safe. That my queer identity wouldn't lead to such risk or harm. When I spoke to my professor, he mentioned that it was the fact that these men were unaware and uneducated that led to such behavior on their part. While all of this may be true, being in a new context I can't help but consider how the dynamics of geography, race, and sexuality functioned in how I assessed my risks, how I processed my experiences, and how people reacted to my narration of this experience.

Fear was brought up by my interlocutors as well. Many of them felt fearful of social consequences if they broke traditional norms. Some feared doing certain kinds of traditional dances. Some were fed up with the gender dynamics of the dance spaces, some expressed fear that heteronormative culture was under attack, and some didn't describe their emotions as fear but rather as reverence for culture and its norms.

Fear also found its way into the classroom, although I didn't always process it as fear. Working through this memory helped me validate experiences that I have found to be psychologically difficult; and validating what was emotionally and mentally difficult was at the center of understanding the risk I bore of doing my research.

I find my experience with this research topic to be similar to that theater class. My risk analysis, in hindsight, was naïve, only considering whether I would reveal that I am queer to interlocutors or not. Before fieldwork, I considered my interlocutors' safety more than my own, all essential measures which taught me how to minimize the impact of my work on their lives (if that is what is most ethical and necessary) and what would make my interlocutors interested in engaging in my research and welcoming me. In the process, I don't remember even considering that I might be at risk. Perhaps it's because I felt like I was in control of my choices or that most professors, in my experience, never really spoke about risk and safety in a nuanced way. Perhaps so much of my reflection is a consequence of learning anthropology for the first time in a mobility program. Very often my colleagues and I also emphasized in our questions and critiques of the discipline the impact of our research methods on the community we are working with and in. Coming from post-colonial contexts, many of us knew the negative impact of unethical research practices, thus placing immense pressure on ourselves to not replicate such behaviors and methods. But this response to the colonial past of the discipline continues to place the researcher on a pedestal, as a person who can handle what the field throws at them with the expectation that they will then be able to process these experiences and write about them within the stipulated time of an academic deadline. Professors have said that life too involves risks, insinuating that these risks are not just the product of doing fieldwork. However, if fieldwork and research weren't a concern, would we make the same decisions? Would we have been in a situation where risky experiences and their physical and emotional consequences are part of our work, where we are not the focus? Would our academic future be a concern in our decision making around reacting to, mitigating, and coping with risky and difficult situations?

Isn't it important that as researchers we process the impact of these risks, as opposed to brushing them off as a part of the job? Why do we—or are we compelled to—minimize them, when in reality they impact us in serious ways. Why do we set them aside? The stuff that usually goes in diaries, not field notes, as if there's a paper hierarchy as well.

My positionality chapter started like this: "I am a Queer Kathak Dancer."

~~This is how it happened. On a typical London day, I waited impatiently at the bus stop waiting for the 265, which was of course running late. As was I. After an hour and a half of travel with one bus change and a conversation with a partner that turned from loving to distressful on the phone, I finally reached a house where I was to sublet the room. Then, after an extremely weird breakfast with the landlady that was prepared by my friend who had told me about the room, the two of us (me + friend) walked to a café to try and complete MY FUCKING THESIS. I remember this scene from \_\_\_ (don't ask me why I have watched that show) where \_\_\_ sits in bed banging out a chapter. She says she has so much to say and on completion, she closes her laptop with complete satisfaction. This is the opposite of my experience with my thesis. Do not get me wrong. I always have thoughts and opinions. It was not easy. I had a lot to say but could rarely find the words. And as humorous as my incomplete narration of the events of that day sounds, I was exhausted, completely battered... This is beside the point.~~

## **A Soliloquy**

I've experienced severe anxiety in new, painful, and astonishing ways while writing this dissertation. I still find it difficult to think about my fieldwork. Writing this piece has felt like walking through a viscous opaque liquid. I'm still not sure why. Even now, I tried to postpone opening my dissertation to look for this sentence. Then I forced myself to get it over with and looked for my dissertation on my laptop, found the file, and scrolled to this first line. I feel a change in my emotional state. What started as a feeling akin to stubbornness, a resistance to do something (a freeze), changed to unpleasant sensations I could map in my body. My head felt heavy, my vision felt blurred. I felt as though I needed to soothe my stomach and my heart and stroke my

eyebrows to soothe my eyes and head. I felt restless and thought of all the things I needed to do. I paced the room and thought of different tasks but never finished them. I scrolled on Instagram. I slowly found the stillness and the words to describe some of what I was and am feeling.

This is months after graduating. Months after my dad read my dissertation. And yet I find it difficult to think through this event beyond blaming myself for not having thought of or remembered to protect myself from harm. I find it difficult to sit with my feelings, especially since they feel like a tide slamming into my body. I find it even more difficult to reflect on my fieldwork, my education and associated experiences, and my emotions. I blame myself for not having been more careful. At the same time, I wonder, how long would this have stayed hidden? Would it have been okay to not mention my sexual identity in my dissertation? Would that have made me feel dishonest? My identity feels central to the lenses through which I saw the field. What made me so sure that I could deal with the consequences of such a topic? Of having to lie at most social gatherings about my dissertation topic or create writing samples that do not reveal my sexual identity in any way so that I can apply for jobs. How can we help queer researchers of color navigate risks—risks that can lead to imprisonment, social isolation, physical and emotional abuse, and much more?

If it is our responsibility to protect ourselves from the consequences of our research, and with LGBTQ+ rights still at nascent stages in so many countries, how can classrooms encourage researchers of color to get involved in such research without leaving the burden of risk completely on us?

While working with LGBTQ+ people, I always felt like there were moments where that shared identity didn't make me a complete outsider to the field. A queer space in any country feels like a space that is more mine than other spaces, where I would feel more comfortable, and this feeling of solidarity and belonging makes it difficult to not feel a sense of responsibility that is also personal. The feeling that you have failed your own community. It isn't an easy feeling to carry,

especially since I often felt like I was fighting to prove the validity of my research and my own identity, in addition to trying to best represent the community whose culture I had just started to get acquainted with.

In class, when I mentioned that an interlocutor spoke of a dance from the archive where two men kiss, I was advised to remember that we didn't know the sexuality of the men and that they were drunk and it was just a friendly kiss. A queer reading seemed to imply that the men would get labeled as queer. When I described the spaces created by some of the queer folk dancers, I was asked to consider whether I was looking at queerness or deeming these practices as "modern" would be better suited to my research.

In the first class after fieldwork, we were given two minutes each to explain the main thing that came from the field. "But if you haven't seen two men dancing together then the field doesn't exist." "But if you don't know if they are both gay then how do you know that this is queer dance?"

## **A Soliloquy**

I see red. I don't want the professor to finish this line of questioning. I get defensive. I verbally retaliate. There is a back-and-forth which makes my thoughts swim.

Who was I defending? Myself? The people I had worked with? Saying of course they're queer and what they do is "queer"?! The existence of "queer folk dancing" in Hungary?

Was I insecure? Was there truly nothing queer about what I was researching? After all, queer as a term is barely used in Hungary, resonating only with a select few who may engage in English-language discourse. I find myself searching my brain for something, a thread to pull at, an argument to throw, a thought to unlock and open. I'm frantically searching through my brain for something concrete and

succinct. The two minutes are up, and we must move on. I'm enraged and I'm anxious. Was my whole fieldwork a lie? Was I chasing something that did not exist? Have I made it all up—the research question and its legitimacy in this context? Had I force fit my interest, the only thing I felt I knew how to study and analyze into a context I found interesting and that happened to work out? Have my ethics been “fantastically selfish”? Had I run into “the field” with an “energy headlong and heedless” only to impose my idea onto it?

How I felt in these interactions with my professors has left more long-lasting impressions on me than my experience of being stalked in the field (which is in addition to men having made comments about my body or made moves to express their interest, all which made me more than uncomfortable in the field; more specifically, they made me nauseous, anxious, disgusted, confused, curious, attentive, dysphoric, and just sad). I don't believe that these experiences can be isolated. I also wrote a chapter in my dissertation on my experience of gender roles and the dysphoria I dealt with in traditional dance spaces while doing research. I didn't realize that the emotional difficulty of classes, and the lack of space to express and work through my fieldwork while having to hear homophobic advice and commentary in the classroom all led to one of the worst periods of mental health I had ever faced.

Like for many others, any reaction to my queerness doesn't just stir up anger, but anxiety and shame. ~~Internalized homophobia is a tough one to unpack. I often wonder, am I ashamed of myself? Or is it more? Do I fear who I am? Do I think of myself as a shameful part of society? Are other people's fears of the existence of queer people real?~~ And anger has always motivated me. It has allowed me to take up space, use my voice, and react to situations. Anxiety and shame, on the other hand, make me feel helpless, and also inadequate. Throughout writing my thesis, I felt as though I wanted to believe that I had something to say, but in reality, I was often made to feel like I was slapping a



label of queerness when there was nothing queer about it at all. Risks aren't just gauged by fears. We all censor ourselves, block out thoughts, or truncate them. Some fears are socially developed, as a result of warning people against risks that they often cannot control. What happens when the perpetrators are in your own classroom? Fear doesn't always come from thinking or confronting thoughts. It can also be a result of who you are thinking with or in response to. Are these thoughts creating a space where thinking about certain concepts becomes unsafe? Is there an ethics to how thought is encouraged, and how does that impact spaces of discourse and learning—interviews, classrooms—especially those in which power structures are at play? With my research, given the conditions of my classroom, I had to learn to sit with myself, my thoughts, and my fieldwork material with curiosity and honesty, and not fear. Does centering myself in this process make me selfish? Or is it acknowledging my involvement that makes my ethics slightly less selfish?

Often during my MA, I felt like I was trying to prove that something was queer or not. In reality, I am not constantly looking for the queer in everything, but I do experience queerness as a feeling rather than a concept or through my sexuality. Especially in traditional spaces. Having said that, fieldwork did feel like searching. Like the boy searching for his imaginary keys in his bag. Of course, it also felt like consuming facts, opinions, information, events, and whatever else I could access, and attempting to understand all that I observed and was told. But it's the searching part that makes me feel like ethics are ultimately so selfish. It makes my actions feel invasive. In hindsight, I don't think I was invasive at all. I realized that this feeling was also rooted in how I had to manipulate my fieldwork in the classroom. The phenomenon of queerness was defined in such specific ways. And if it didn't fit their narrow definition of it, other terms like *modernity* were asked to be considered. The difficulty with such mentorship is that one must constantly, during a period where one is learning and questioning oneself, then be able to carry such criticism with care. To never reject it

without cause, but to carefully consider it without affirmative guidance. It is no longer a radical thought to think of and look at straightness as a manufactured ideal. A fake assurance of stability and order in society. When I say I look for queerness, I don't always look for signs of sexual or gender bending (so to speak). I am looking for dissonances. For when the rules of normative sexuality and gender for a moment or for longer show faults, incidentally or intentionally. I have always found desire to be a reason for the eruption of queerness at the fault lines of the many rules of normativity.

In a queer reading circle I attended, we were all asked the question "When is dance not queer?" This question was posed as we read Clare Croft's *Queer Dance*. What this question does is that it inverts the (hetero)normative ways of thinking. It helps us ask the question: Is there something characteristic about straightness in movement? The shrinking of the possibility of what is queer or can be considered queer. To shrink one's imagination with respect to the various possibilities of what can be queer movement would be to also impose a normative and Eurocentric understanding of what queerness is on these emerging modes of expression. Even if my writing is not censored, can I allow myself to think about what I need to in the ways I need to?

I realize now that a significant part of my anxiety came from the fact that my research topic triggered hidden fears I had no idea existed. They manifest as closed doors I'm too scared to open, and so I stand in front of them, walk along the walls of the space they enclose, but never find a way in. These brick walls (as Sarah Ahmed has called them) were a result of my own fears (perhaps I wish I was the ideal immigrant and student), but also ways of thinking framed within the classroom that made such walls emerge.

Finding a research topic felt like a search, so much of which was within myself. And queerness too often feels like an experience of consistent introspection: searching, looking, and changing. To approach ourselves with curiosity. To fight against brick walls that are a

product of social conditioning and rules. Thoughts and ideas are scary things, and safety is a feeling as much as it is a physical reality. And thoughts can become structured out of fear of being harmed.

The use of past tense here is misleading. Writing this, although slightly easier, too felt like a threat. This time, however, I know a little better what it is that I'm feeling, and why it is that I am feeling this way. After a particularly helpful therapy session (~~which I will get into later, or maybe another time... let's see how this goes~~), I was finally able to think about what I felt I needed to sit with in order to start writing this piece.

To begin with, writing this in itself is risky. Especially because as I write this, I am living at home, with my parents. And although they both know that I am queer, there hasn't been much acceptance around this. This was the first thing I realized in my session. I've written on queerness before, and it had severe consequences on my life. My inability to write this piece this time comes from past trauma. The difficulty of writing it and the resistance I feel towards that comes from knowing that acknowledging consequences only helps one not get blindsided. But the pain of dealing with them is still ours to bear. The risks we face, we often face alone. Anthropology, as selfish as I make it sound, is also an act of courage. To face oneself and others with humility and humanity, while taking responsibility for their safety and one's own. Without courage, we couldn't do what we do. But we are human, we too need looking after.

## Epilogue

I am writing this in November, which is Pride Month in Bangalore. My friend and I were late, as was my other friend. Peeking out of the rickshaw, we tried to catch the march mid-way, only to realize upon calling one of the organizers that they were "starting NOW." We hurried back to the starting point of the march. I was surprised by the turnout. Thousands of people had gathered in a variety of fabulous

outfits, catching many small business vendors and passersby on foot or seated in vehicles by surprise. The ice cream trucks made quite a fortune that day. I heard some homophobic comments screamed out of a school bus. A woman reached out of her rickshaw for a pamphlet one of the volunteers was passing out. Some aunties peered questioningly out the windows of their Silver Toyota Innova. Many had their own placards, but volunteers handed some out as well. We moved at a slow pace, volunteers often tried to usher us to keep up the pace or stay off the road. About 10 minutes into us walking with the crowd, I heard, coming somewhere from behind me, the faint echoes of a slogan. I recognized it—the word *Azadi* and its rhythm—as though, over the years, it was etched into my being. I slowed down my pace, letting groups of people walk ahead of me. In about 15 minutes I had caught up to one of the group that was chanting. They had taken a break. Overlapping with the beat of the drum that rippled towards us from the front of the march, *Azadi Azadi Aa zaa dii* bellowed someone from the crowd. A group of people echoed them. *Freedom Freedom Frr eee dom.*

Not once does this rendition of the slogan bring up sexuality, gender, or queerness. And yet without these explicit words, it reverberates in our hearts and becomes emblematic of our movement. Before the march, we had all been warned not to chant any slogans related to Palestine. It was a request from the organizers since getting police permission for this march had been so difficult. It was a request (well more like an instruction) that we all respected and followed. But as we raised our voices and our fists asking for freedom, it was obvious that this poem of resistance is present at almost every protest I go to, taking on a new meaning every time. From Pakistan to Kashmir to India, this poem has been molded by us to ask for our right to freedom.

This piece is also a consequence of two years in a European higher education program. I write this during the ongoing genocide in Palestine.

So somewhere, I realize, I also try to investigate the idea of freedom. Investigate, because freedom is not as obvious a concept as we may think. Investigate, because I'm searching for and making sense of the work, its boundaries, and its limits. Investigate because sometimes the very idea that we can be free in old and new ways is novel.

Quoting Kamla Bhasin:

From Patriarchy

*Azadi*

From All Hierarchy

*Azadi*

From endless violence

*Azadi*

From Helpless silence

*Azadi.*

For walking freely

*Azadi.*

For talking freely

*Azadi.*

For dancing madly

*Azadi.*

For singing loudly

*Azadi.*

For self-expression

*Azadi.*

For celebration

So tell me now that you don't see **Palestine** reverberated in this slogan.  
Tell me now that you don't see **Palestine** present in every step we take.  
So tell me now that our freedoms are not linked.

We recently held an event for which we got backlash from professors of our program. We were reprimanded and belittled in subtly obvious ways for organizing the event. Us calling out double standards was seen as a comparison to a certain war in Europe. There are many ways in which one can be made less free. Maybe they can't directly stop us from saying or doing something. But they sure can make the consequences dire.

For every person in power who put up brick walls during our education, I had a band of classmates with me, us breaking them down together. Thinking critically together, arguing together, learning together, and growing together, we developed our thinking beyond what the classroom provided. Sometimes your research community is your class and by knowing and negotiating with each other we can learn and take our best practices to fieldwork. Sometimes best practices are built with our interlocutors as well. Our solidarity helps us share risk and build safety.