

RETURNING HOME AND TO THE FIELD*

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Last week I “returned from the field.” Even though I am back home I certainly don’t feel at home. I feel disoriented for all sorts of reasons. Because I came back during the sixth week of the semester, I feel like an outsider in my workplace, an empty shell moving through corridors and seminar rooms. (Was that me teaching that class a few months ago?) Where I live now seems foreign, perhaps because I’ve lived longer in Berlin than in any of my American homes during the last ten years. This blurring of home and the field reminds me of an experience last year when two of my Berlin research consultants gave lectures about their work at my “home” university. Due to various conversations and interactions, I unexpectedly had to face some of the moral issues and social relations of the field at home. I felt almost schizophrenic, torn between worlds, cultures, sets of social relations, and selves.

A researcher cannot easily divide her research and personal selves into separate sites of home and the field. Although many geographers realize this in theory, in practice we often construct emotional, spatial, and temporal boundaries between personal and work lives, a *here* and *there*, a home and field. The dislocations I experienced in returning from the field or when the field invaded my home resulted from my attempts to protect myself from my work. Yet these very dislocations forced me to acknowledge that life in one place influences social relations in another.

Home and the field are unstable categories that are designated by research conventions, the academy, and researchers in particular ways. By moving between ever-changing homes/fields and social relations, the researcher must acknowledge that research spaces are always hybrid; they are complex social spaces of dislocation. Furthermore, our identities are constantly made and remade through repetitive performances—performances that include research (Rose 1997). When we move back and forth between shifting homes and fields, our research agendas, relationships, and even our own understandings of ourselves as researchers will change because we can never know who we will become during the research process. As I describe below through personal vignettes about conducting follow-up research in Berlin, Germany, when we return and share our writings with research consultants, we are forced to challenge previously held assumptions and to negotiate new research relationships. Facing our unease in such settings may be difficult, but it may also lead to new insights and more empathetic geographies and histories.

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