Schmoozing with My Sisters: At-Home Ethnography in Brisbane's Jewish Communityⁱ

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Abstract

Within anthropology, there is a distinguished history of Jewish ethnographers and ethnographic research on Jewish life. There is also a wealth of “insider anthropology” conducted by Jewish anthropologists in their own Jewish communities. Of these, many take a feminist anthropological approach, actively interrogating the power dynamics at play within and around the communities they discuss, and within the ethnographic relationship itself. In this essay, the author reflects on her own experiences as a feminist and insider anthropologist in Brisbane's Jewish community. The essay discusses the negotiation of the dual roles of insider and scholar, and the ways in which feminist epistemological approaches work within this negotiation.

Introduction

When I began my time in the field as a newly-anointed anthropology graduate student, freshly furnished with ethical approval documentation, I didn't board a plane to some far-flung part of the world. I picked up my field notebook and drove thirty minutes to the other side of the city to my own Jewish communal centre for a community picnic celebrating *Yom Ha'atzmaut*, the anniversary of the 1948 founding of the State of Israel, in much the same way I did every year. This time, however, I was going open-eyed, looking for answers to the questions at the heart of my research, what made the community ‘work’ as a part of modern Australian multicultural life. I met Joriⁱⁱ, an Israeli-born young man, working on a youth group booth. We chatted for hours about the community – shared friends, politics, family. We caught up over coffee at university, where Jori told me his family history, his philosophical approach to Judaism and Zionism, and his experiences in the community. We met again at parties, at community meetings and dinners, the whole way through my first year of official fieldwork. Then, at the big Chanukah festival in the middle of the city, I ran into Jori and a group of young Jewish women. In high spirits, the women all exchanged embraces with me, one after the other. Caught up in the moment, I went to embrace Jori; with a look of horror, he stepped back suddenly, eyes darting to the nearby booth where the local Orthodox Rabbi and his Lubavitch colleagues were helping men lay *tefillin*, strapping small receptacles of *Torah* holy scrolls to their arms and foreheads to pray. After a moment frozen in awkwardness, I turned my outstretched arm into an embarrassed wave, which Jori uncomfortably returned, and left after some mumbled small talk. A week later, I headed to *Krav Maga* self-defence class; there was Jori, my trainer. For the next hour, he urged me on as I grappled him into an armlock and thrust

my elbow at his head, again and again. In the gym, no unspoken barrier of *Halakha*, Jewish religious law, lay between us. In front of the rabbi and the community, with our Judaism on show to the rest of the world, even though neither of us were strictly Orthodox, *Negiah* laws meant that he, a man, and I, a woman not his wife, should not touch. Judaism is not always an easy religion in which to be a woman, still less a feminist. Jewish culture, even in communities which are not ultra-Orthodox in observance and are well-integrated with modern secular society, is still largely patriarchal, hetero-normative and marked by gender inequality in public activity and leadership. Many of the standards of *Halakha* are staunchly upheld in the public realm, even by many whose private expressions of Jewish identity at home do not include the same strictures. This is seen in varying degrees in different Jewish communities around the world, with varying levels of observance. However, public Jewish life in Australia, where my work is based, frequently highlights the religious practices of Modern Orthodox Judaism as markers of Jewish cultural authenticity, and places many Orthodox-leaning religious restrictions on public behaviour, especially for women (Creese 2019, Fagenblat, Landau, and Wolski 2006). This poses significant challenges for the anthropologist of Judaism and Jewish life and identity, particularly when the anthropologist is a woman, and a Jewish woman at that. As evident in my own experiences with Jori, Jewish cultural restrictions and expectations around gender can greatly affect the anthropologist's interactions with community members. This is particularly true for an 'insider' or 'native' anthropologist (Cerroni-Long 1995) who is themselves a member of the community who are the subject of the research, and who might be expected to 'know better.' When undertaking anthropological research as an insider, drawing on cultural connectivity and authenticity to enrich one's work, this same authenticity also articulates the norms of one's behaviour. Navigating the challenge of completing holistic and robust fieldwork within a gendered cultural framework can be a difficult task for the insider anthropologist. Yet equally challenging is the navigation between the insider anthropologist's two competing facets of identity: the community member and the researcher. Here, I reflect on my experiences as an insider anthropologist conducting ethnographic fieldwork in my own Jewish community in Australia from 2015-2018, particularly in my interactions with other women; my '*schmoozing*' with my 'sisters.' I explore how feminist ideas of identity construction, particularly as a performative construct, influenced the dual positions of 'anthropologist' and 'insider' self-experienced by anthropologists working amongst their own communities.

A Legacy of Jewish Insider Anthropology

Anthropology as a discipline has engaged many times with explorations of Jewishness through the years: not just of Judaism, although that can certainly be part of the research scope, but of the whole breadth of religious, ethnic, political, cultural and even genetic facets of Jewish identity. Anthropologists have studied various Jewish populations and communities. Some have been non-Jewish anthropologists, including Margaret Mead, well-known as one of the founders of feminist anthropology, who with Ruth Benedict initiated the anthropological study of Jewish migrants in America from the Eastern European *shtetls* which ultimately become Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog's acclaimed book *Life is With People* (1952). Other non-Jewish anthropologists of Judaism have analysed Jewish dietary laws (Douglas 1966) and the Jewish societies of Israel (Domínguez 1989) and Denmark (Buckser 2003). Many more anthropologists who have conducted research on the Jewish communities of the world have been Jewish themselves. These anthropologists often situate themselves as 'insiders' in a cultural sense in that their Jewishness gives them a shared bond with their participants and a sense of *bona fides* through which to speak about Jewish culture to a global audience. Some of these recent works include ethnographies by Jewish anthropologists on Jewish communities in Croatia (Hofman 2006), South Asia (Egorova 2018) and Turkey (Brink-Danan 2011).

However, a third stream of anthropological works on the Jewish lived experience add significantly to the literature; works by Jewish anthropologists in, and on, their own communities. These works see the ethnographer examine not only the life of the community around them, but their own co-participation in this life, and how their own story and experiences intertwine with those of their fellow community members. David Hayano (1979), who first described the potential of such insider works, used the term "autoethnography" to discuss the concept of the minority anthropologist examining their own home community; indeed, such works often include a great deal of the anthropologist's 'self' within them, and are rich in personal reflection and connection. One of the most lauded and cited Jewish works in this vein was the 1978 book and documentary *Number Our Days*, where Barbara Myerhoff examined a community of elderly Jews from Venice, California where she had previously been a social worker, encouraged to "study her own" and do "fieldwork as a friend, and sometimes as a family member" (Myerhoff 1978, 11, 17). Although it might be argued that the young Myerhoff was possibly not truly an 'insider' of the elderly community she observed, her resulting ethnography was deeply personally connected, shared stories with a natural cultural

richness and understanding, and brought to life intimate portraits that felt less like an anthropological study and more like a family photograph album. Reviewer Eleanor Wachs (1982, 234) points out the sensitivity of *Number our Days*, the “richly humanistic” portrayals of lived experience, and the rewarding depth of the relationship between Myerhoff and the community she worked with. Since Myerhoff’s early work, a number of other anthropologists have followed the ‘autoethnographic’ turn to examine the Jewish communities of their family and childhood (Brodkin 1998, Behar 2007, Azoulay 1997), or those in which they live in (Prell 1989, Boyarin 2011) or alongside (Davidman 1991, Fader 2009, El-Or 1994). These later works share a similar richness to that which critics praised in *Number Our Days*; Ruth Behar’s work is praised for its beauty and theoretical sophistication, Karen Brodtkin’s for its extensive and rich theoretical contributions (Brink-Danan 2008), and Ayala Fader’s for its “stimulating and reflexive journey” (Kasstan 2016, 265).

Works like these have not been undertaken without their own complications; some insider Jewish ethnographers report difficult personal experiences in negotiating insider status (Kasstan 2016), difficulty separating themselves from the expectations of their communities (Fader 2007), and difficulties in reconciling their ethnographic experiences with their own personal histories and beliefs (Davidman 1991). Nevertheless, the resulting works of ethnography are all rich, engaging and eye-opening works of scholarship, with a shift for the reader away from an outsider gaze to a deeply reflective examination of self and belonging. In particular, the feminist approach that many of these scholars draw on in their work allows for a deeper interrogation the power dynamics at play within and around these communities, and in the ethnographic relationship itself. As Fader comments, the feminist and insider epistemologies go well hand-in-hand; an insider approach can help solve dilemmas of representation, a feminist approach “committed to de-colonizing anthropology can de-parochialize and politicize Jewish ethnography” (Fader 2007, 113), and both together can help overcome views of a monolithic, homogenous and exotic Jewish lived experience.

Performing the Insider Self as a Researcher

I came to anthropology from a background in feminist oral history practice, and I never intended to deliberately draw on a feminist praxis in this new area. Indeed, as I told new and former colleagues and advisors, I was done talking only about women’s experiences. I reasoned I could not achieve a holistic and realistic investigation of my small Jewish community without incorporating the experiences, voices and choices of men, particularly as male community

leaders ostensibly held much of the power within the community, and were at the forefront of most interactions with the state and other minority group representatives. Yet, in some ways, my decision to take this focus on the relationship between the community and the multicultural state drew on ideas core to feminist anthropology. As Lynn Walter argues, “feminist anthropology is as interested in how people resist and change oppressive structures as it is in how people accommodate oppression” (Walter 1995, 273). Despite not focusing on gender specifically, investigating the politics of how Jewish individuals and communities negotiate, accommodate and work to change their place within the multicultural state, in many ways, drew significantly from the same feminist ontology I had deliberately tried to move away from.

My career as an anthropologist has focused on the negotiation of the Jewish place in contemporary multicultural society. In conceptualising this negotiation, I draw strongly on theories of the performativity of identity, as described by gender theorist Judith Butler (1993). Originally based in studies of gender, performativity theory, summarized briefly, states that identity is not made up of one’s own practices, values, histories and choices. Instead, identity is produced and constantly reformed from the repeated speaking and doing of the dominant norms of that identity. What that means for Jewish identity – when a Jewish community says ‘we are Jews in a multicultural society’ – is that the community constantly forms, reforms and recontests what that identity means in relation to mainstream society by having dominant norms and saying and doing those norms over and over again. Those norms constitute the subject: they say things like ‘we Jews are religious,’ ‘we Jews are Australian,’ ‘we Jews are dedicated to Israel.’ In reflecting on my own practice as an insider anthropologist, I see this in many ways as also a performative identity; in fact, two identities, the community insider, and the anthropologist. Each is governed by a set of dominant norms and performs acts and utterances which constitute their subject within each collective. In each collective, as insider and anthropologist, both I and those around me would say and do thing that make up the norms forming the identity of that collective. These norms shaped my experiences in both worlds, or more accurately the way I conducted myself in them, and the actions and speech act I performed.

From the day my ethnographic research approval was granted, my self-perception shifted. I was not just my Jewish self anymore. I was a researcher, and the purpose of this new layer of my identity was to look with open eyes and listen with open ears to my community. The insider position was important to me in exploring the way the community constructed and

experienced itself in relation to Australian mainstream society; as an insider I could explore this alongside the community, from their position in the relationship between the community and the state. My Jewish identity, for me, became the key with which I would open doors. Thus, my approach to declaring this insider status in the field was to incorporate Jewish cultural norms into my presentation, through my actions and visual statements. I would carefully select the outfits I would wear for fieldwork; Orthodox Jewish law incorporates standards of modesty, or *Tzniut*, in dress and behaviour, and while I drew the line at covering my hair or dressing neck-to-ankle in shapeless neutral colours, modest neck- and hem-lines, light cardigans covering my arms and leggings under dresses became my standard ‘uniform’ of interviews, even in the Australian summer where temperatures can reach 40°Cⁱⁱⁱ and those I was interviewing were in shirtsleeves and sundresses. While I ate freely in my own home, I became highly controlled and anxious over what I ate in the field, particularly in front of people, in an attempt to ensure I did not violate *kosher* dietary laws. My field-site of South-East Queensland had no *kosher* dining establishments, and while I would comfortably meet interview participants in their own homes, a request to meet at a café would make me particularly nervous. Early in my research I met Alexia, a director of a local Jewish organization, at an upscale inner-city café for a lunchtime interview; I read the menu over and over again, desperately searching for an option which would safely and recognizably be *kosher*. As the waiter arrived and Alexia ordered, then turned to me asking for my order, in a panic I could only manage “I’ll have the same,” confident at least that any *kosher* good enough for her to eat would be good enough for her to see me eat as well. Our meals arrived – a Chicken Waldorf salad that, with a yoghurt-based dressing,^{iv} was hardly the epitome of *kosher* dining – and Alexia ate happily and chatted about the research I planned to do. As with my clothing anxieties, my dietary anxieties, though safe, were in the end misplaced.

After the first few encounters properly ‘in the field’ I did relax somewhat, though was still conscious of being a “proper” Jew. My identity as a Jewish mother and daughter often came to play in the field; my mother was well-known in the community, serving on her synagogue board and being a member of several community organisations and social networks. My children attended the Jewish playgroup, the Jewish kindergarten, and the occasionally community festival celebration. In conceptualising my lived experience in the community as ‘entering the field,’ I began reformulating my practice and identity within the community as a good Jewish mother and daughter. I brought my begrudging children along to weekend Jewish

youth group, encouraged them to play nicely with the other Jewish children they knew vaguely, and sat to watch and make sense of the programming and interactions. In the parents' kitchen, I came across Lorelai, a community leader I had been trying unsuccessfully for months to get an interview with. "Hello, how have you been, are your kids here?" she asked. I pointed out my seven-year-old, playing happily with Lorelai's own two children. Lorelai enthused warmly, "I hadn't realised our children were so close in age; we should get them together more often. It's so hard here in this community, everyone lives all over the place, different schools, so spread out." Lorelai made me a black coffee, and talked to me almost non-stop about her life in the community for the two hours of the youth group meeting. As we were leaving, I somewhat guiltily reminded her that I was writing a thesis on life in the community; was anything we'd talked about off-the record? "Oh no, that's all fine. We should do this again. Come for *Shabbos*", we'll talk more. Bring the kids." For Lorelai, an interaction between two mothers was more of a conversation, more of a communication of equals, than an interview between a researcher and a community leader, even if both of them were Jewish. Such a revelation of the multiple facets of the lives of both researcher and participant to "create conditions in which the respondent enters into the process as an active agent" (Bloom 1997, 111) is a useful cornerstone of feminist anthropology which can make ethnographic practice particularly fruitful, enhancing the fluid and situational negotiation and renegotiation of consent which is already at the heart of ethnographic practice.

I found I was not the only person who formulated and reformulated my Jewish identity in the field. Unlike the experiences Ben Kasstan reports, where as a patrilineal Jew his lineage was insufficiently Jewish for his Orthodox Jewish participants and he "became entangled in a conflict of (in)authenticity within the field site... where the inauthentic was then constructed through [him] as a medium" (Kasstan 2016, 268), I found that many of my own participants actively strengthened my authenticity and connection to the community through rhetoric when I was in the field. I found myself brought into Jewish mother's groups and social networks I had never been included in before. The Jewish authenticity in question did not even need to be my own; my mother's brief synagogue board service declared me a dedicated Modern Orthodox congregant, my siblings' Birthright tours to Israel and even my non-Jewish mother-in-law's sabbatical year in Jerusalem formulated me communally as a good Zionist. On one occasion, my non-Jewish partner accompanied me nervously to a formal community event, awkwardly wearing a brand-new and unfamiliar *kippah* skullcap. Upon our arrival, a handful

of older female community members cornered him for the evening, attempting to convince everyone, particularly him, how “Israeli” he looked. He must be, somewhere back in the family tree; was I sure he wasn’t Israeli? they asked me for months afterwards. These sorts of Israel connections, real or perceived, helped overcome some of the challenges in connecting with Israeli migrant community members with whom I, as a diaspora Jew, sometimes struggled to find a connection due to linguistic and political barriers.

My identity became often and easily rewritten, and sometimes not even in my own hand, to clearly fit me into community norms. Such a “willingness...to be crafted by the other” is also a hallmark of the feminist anthropological approach and its goal of “an authentic, moral communicative practice” (Walter 1995, 283). At the same time, it is not lost on me that my own choice to co-participate in this performative community identity actually helps to enact the construction and formulation of subject that I am attempting to study, which further cements and complicates my insider status. When I dress a certain way, or eat a certain way, in order to respect the norms of community identity, at the same time I uphold and reify those norms. Presenting and being presented as an insider may be read as exactly the kind of performative construction of identity Butler describes; through repeated acts and visual rhetorical statements, I formulated my identity as a member of the community by reifying the dominant norms of the community identity within myself. These norms were also formulated around me, and for me, by the community. The dissonance I experienced in the field when accidentally transgressing those norms, as in the interaction with Jori I described, and my anxiety over potential future transgressions, are symptomatic of the struggle to reconcile the insider anthropologist’s two selves; not just to perform the authentic identity of the insider while researching, but also to recognise when the academic self needs to be addressed or realised in and outside the field.

Reconciling the Academic Self as an Insider

While I spent my time in the field highly conscious of presenting and performing the best version of my Jewish insider self, I was also highly conscious of my own identity as a researcher, and to start with, highly uncomfortable that people might consider me as nosy, prying and only present to treat them like laboratory animals. When Bill, an elderly gentleman from the community who I had interviewed and grown quite close to, passed away suddenly, I found myself in tears in my advisor’s office, convinced that if I went to his funeral his family would be outraged that I was ‘anthropologizing’ them in their time of grief. Much of this

anxiety came from my own expectations; I soon found that most people in the community were perfectly happy to chat on-record and, indeed, proud to contribute. “Is this for the book?”, I would be asked. “How’s the book going? When can I read it?” Other pressures, however, came from the academy. Even benignly, colleagues would ask what the community did about certain things. Every time we uttered the word “they,” rather than “you” from them or “we” from me, I felt the uncomfortable slide away from insider status to othering. I was one of only a few students in my department whose projects did not involve “over there” field experiences. They negotiated the boundaries between the field and the academy, subject and self, much more easily than I seemed able to articulate when we discussed our work together. I often felt immense pressure, and sometimes dread, that my work, and by extension, myself, was representing the identity of my entire community to my peers. I found, like Fader (2007), that the academy encouraged me towards particular ways of thinking, particularly about Jewish religious faith and practice, which felt alien to the ways in which I saw and heard my community relate to Judaism. My academic experience was also made more complex by the interaction I had with my advisor, a notable anthropologist who was also Jewish and grew up the same community where I worked, though his field of research was very different to mine. My advisor was co-invested in my project, both as an academic mentor and educator, and as a subject; our discussions of what I had found in fieldwork would invariably bring up observations regarding the practices and experiences of his own Jewish family and network, and I even interviewed him as an ethnographic participant. Our discussions and observations of the community were rich and rewarding for the development of my research. Yet I have questioned, since finishing fieldwork, whether our conversations were two anthropologists observing a community, or two community members discussing the community from within; whether our discussions were shaping my professional practice, or merely providing additional field notes.

Undoubtedly, insider status gave me a natural access to events, meetings and connections within the community; I could go along to festivals, to dinners, to lectures, just as I had before I was an anthropologist, and never had to explain my presence. On some occasions, however, while my insider status might have opened the door to people’s home, it was my researcher self with which they interacted. I noted this particularly in stories, discussions and interactions that were less comfortable for participants to discuss publicly. One afternoon, I went to visit Elena, in her nineties, at her home the day before her family took her away to the

Jewish Nursing Home in the next state. Most of her furniture, apart from the one armchair in which she spent most of her day, had been packed, so I sat on a cushion on the floor by her feet. When I had come towards the end of my prepared list of questions, Elena asked me whether I had grown up locally. A seasoned ethnographer by now, I recognised this test for insider status. I grew up in the country, I replied, after my non-observant Jewish parents divorced. “Oh, I should tell you about my religious divorce. I’m pretty sure nobody else will be able to tell you, I think I’m the only one in the community my age who could tell you about that,” she said. She recounted to me the day she visited the *Beit Din*, or religious law court, to get a divorce. She recalled the pressure placed on her absent, refusing husband after her parents paid a rabbi to advocate; being scolded for bare arms, and having her wedding ring scrubbed off her finger with soap and water. “Such an ordeal, one of the worst experiences you can go through. It was shaming for my parents, but I had to do it.” Listening back to this interview as I later transcribed it, there was a pause following her story so long it feels like the recording has malfunctioned. In reality I sat there, stretching out the moment of her narrative, unwilling and feeling unworthy to break it, finally mumbling something about how awful the experience sounded, a response I couldn’t even bring myself to transcribe later, ending the transcription with Elena’s words instead. Another afternoon, I visited Samuel and Hanna, both in their eighties, at home, ostensibly to interview Samuel who had grown up in the local Jewish community and had been referred to me by Bill, my late friend in the community, for his “great stories of the old days in the community.” As Samuel busied himself in his study finding photograph albums to show me, Hanna asked about my family background; another test I could recognize of my insider status. My grandmother left Holland just before the *Shoah*^{vi}, I replied, and my grandfather had grown up in Indonesia and been imprisoned by Japanese forces during the War. The Japanese in the Pacific, terrible, Hanna agreed. Unbidden, her own story spilled out; daughter of a Rabbi in Singapore, her family, like mine, had been interned during the war in the Pacific. She told me all about her executed uncles, being interned with her mother and sisters, sleeping in a heap on top of one another to prevent the older girls from being dragged away and assaulted. “One tried to molest my mother, I heard her screaming and I popped up and bit him on the hand, I screamed in English and Japanese until he left.” As I had in Elena’s house, I sat silent for a long time after this story, unwilling to break Hanna’s narrative and the space around it. Just before the silence stretched to discomfort, Samuel returned with his albums, and Hanna refocused the interview on his memories instead, prompting him over

photographs of friends and neighbours and memories of their shared experiences. Neither Hanna's nor Elena's stories had much to do with the Jewish place in multicultural Australia *per se*, though clearly were an important part of each woman's own story of their Jewish life.

Just as Tamar El-Or (1992) speaks of finding in her own work, such intimacy both surprised and thrilled me as an anthropologist; to be told stories that an informant would never tell an outsider. Yet, El-Or states she came to a realisation that her Gur Hasidic women informants would often tell her deeply intimate things precisely because she was asking as a researcher and not a neighbour or friend. In a similar way, experiences like that of hearing Elena's and Hanna's stories perhaps came about less because I was an insider – although this may have opened their doors in the first place – but more because I was a researcher. I had not asked about either of these experiences; indeed, I had not come to Hanna's home to speak specifically to her at all. Yet these intimate stories were told to me; not, as I had thought, because these women would never tell an outsider this, but perhaps because they could not tell them to other insiders in the course of daily life. Norms of the community removed some topics from the collective identity and discourse – survivor stories outside the *Shoah*, or stories outside the model of the ideals of Jewish marriage and family – and the act of research empowered their tellers' agency by taking them outside the sphere of these norms. Perhaps most telling in this regard was the interview I sat down to do with my own mother. In this interview, she told me all about growing up with her own mother, *Shoah*-survivor; of tense relationships in her childhood, especially over food and eating^{vii}, and a colossal row when my mother was fifteen, in which my grandmother had told her for the first time that she was Jewish: "She screamed at me I was a Jew, like it was a dirty secret, she said "never tell anyone because people will attack you." It took me a while to realise she knew this because she was Jewish too." Some weeks after the interview, I asked her why she'd never told me about that memory before. "I don't know, I suppose it was because you were asking. It's not something we'd just come to in regular conversation, is it? But I'm glad you asked." In this way, the researcher side of the insider anthropologist's self might be just as much of a performative construct as the insider. By asking questions about their lives and experiences, by establishing this as the reason for coming to their homes for our interaction, I had, in performative terms, formulated my identity as that of researcher. Insider status may have eased the interaction – shared cultural understandings, interpersonal connections and familiar experiences. In these ways I was a friend, a neighbour, a daughter. Yet a friend or neighbour would not come naturally to someone to ask about their

daily life and their past experiences; a daughter might, in the course of collecting a mother's life history or memories as a way of formulating her own history and sense of identity, though in this interaction the daughter arguably reformulates her identity to that of researcher. El-Or discusses that this barrier between subject and friend was, in fact, the fuel that sustained her fieldwork; "we can't be friends because she was my object and we both know it" (1992, 71). In my own work, I was – and still am – friends with many of those whose words and experiences contribute to my research. Yet when I see Hanna at *Hanukkah* parties, those childhood stories go unspoken. When I see Elena's adult sons and ask after her, we never speak of her ex-husband. Rightly or wrongly, I never again asked my mother about her lost Jewish childhood. Knowing the intimate details of my advisor's history, his private religious beliefs and family secrets, has made for a rich interpersonal relationship, though at times a complex professional one, particularly when relating to other students who share the same advisor. For the insider ethnographer, I suggest, leaving 'the field' might sometimes mean leaving behind not one's participants as in traditional fieldwork, but leaving one's researcher self in the academic world.

Conclusions

Thinking back on my experiences in the field, on balance being an insider eased my journey as a new anthropologist – certainly my cultural and social connections opened doors, homes and conversations that others may have struggled to enter, particularly in a community that has often expressed discomfort at having personal information studied by outsiders. Being an insider also allowed for a deeper space for reflexivity and awareness of how concepts like power, knowledge and representation interplay within anthropological work. These ideas have developed directly from the feminist anthropology framework which I initially strove to step away from, but which naturally became a part of the positionality from which I approached research. A feminist anthropological approach "obligates the anthropologist to identify and defend her relationship to scholarly questions and to place her words about another culture in ongoing communication with its practitioners" (Walter 1995, 273). I would extend this claim beyond anthropological work with another culture, as such an obligation also enriches the work of those working inside their own cultures. Feminist anthropology aims to give research participants more agency to create their own representations; insider anthropology can open and sustain a relationship where this agency may flow cooperatively. Insider anthropology encourages the reflexivity that feminist anthropology requires to transcend differences of power, belief, class and politics; feminist anthropology encourages the anthropologist to

interrogate and advocate to address the power imbalances within the norms of their community, gendered or otherwise. In this, one can see reflected the challenge and the privilege of the insider at-home ethnographer; to be reflexive, responsive, engaged and intimately connected, and ultimately a part of both the worlds of home and the academy.

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ⁱⁱ As per American Anthropological Association and Australian Anthropological Society ethical guidelines, all research participants named throughout this essay have been referred to by pseudonyms.

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^{iv} A traditional Waldorf salad made on mayonnaise is considered *kosher*, but the lower-fat rendition with dairy yoghurt breaches the *kosher* prohibition on mixing meat and milk.

^v Friday night dinner, which is observed between friends by many in my particular Jewish community regardless of their own religiosity or synagogue attendance.

^{vi} *Shoah* is the Hebrew term for the Holocaust often preferred within my particular Jewish community when talking to other Jews; Holocaust for talking to non-Jews.

^{vii} Wajnryb (2001) observes that food anxieties and tensions are particularly common in the life narratives of second-generation *Shoah* survivors and their relationships with their parents.