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# Research Associates and the Production of Knowledge in the Field

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This article introduces an important, but overlooked, actor—the research associate—into methodological discussions about the production of knowledge. We use the term *research associate* (rather than assistant) to encompass the individuals on whom researchers rely while conducting fieldwork. We seek to avoid the unidirectional hierarchy and power dynamics between researchers and associates, which place the researcher as expert and knowledge producer while obscuring the diversity of roles conducted by field associates. Therefore, throughout this article we examine and destabilize power dynamics and hierarchies and widen the range of what is considered research assistance in the coproduction of knowledge. We also highlight the ways in which geopolitics are written into encounters with ourselves and research associates, encounters that render and reveal the complexities of vulnerability and bodily risk in fieldwork. The goals of this article are threefold: to (1) introduce the influential role of research associates during the production and dissemination of knowledge, (2) situate the work of research associates in both fieldwork and methodological literature, and (3) problematize the invisibility of research associates in academic publications and discuss possible alternatives to how authorship is credited. **Key Words:** *feminist methodology, fieldwork, geopolitics, research associates, vulnerability.*

本文将一类重要但受到忽略的行动者——协同研究者——引介至有关知识生产的方法论探讨。我们运用“协同研究协者”（而非助理）之概念来包含研究者在进行田野工作时所倚赖的对象。我们寻求避免研究者与协同者之间单向的阶层关系及权力动态，这些关系与动态，将研究者视为专家与知识生产者，同时隐匿了田野协同者所扮演的多样角色。我们因而在本文中检视并挑战权力动态及阶层关系，并拓展知识生产中什麼被视为研究助理的范畴。我们同时强调地缘政治写入我们与协同研究者相遇的方式，这些相遇呈现并揭露田野工作中脆弱性的复杂性与身体化的风险。本文的目标有三：(1) 介绍协同研究者在知识生产与传播过程中影响力的角色，(2) 将协同研究者的工作同时置入田野与方法论的文献，以及(3) 问题化学术发表中被隐身的协同研究者，并讨论认可作者身份的可能另类方式。 **关键词：** *女权主义方法论，田野，地缘政治，协同研究者，脆弱性。*

Este artículo introduce un importante, aunque ignorado actor—el investigador asociado—en las discusiones metodológicas relacionadas con la producción de conocimiento. Usamos la expresión de investigador asociado (en vez de asistente) para abarcar los individuos en quienes confiar durante el trabajo de campo. Buscamos evitar la jerarquía unidireccional y la dinámica del poder entre investigadores y asociados, que colocan al investigador como experto y productor de conocimiento al tiempo que se oscurece la diversidad de papeles cumplidos por sus asociados de campo. Por consiguiente, a lo largo de este artículo examinamos y desestabilizamos la dinámica de poder y las jerarquías, y ampliamos el ámbito de lo que se considera asistencia de investigación en la coproducción de conocimiento. También destacamos las maneras como las geopolíticas se inscriben en los encuentros con nosotros mismos y con los asociados de investigación, encuentros que generan y revelan las complejidades de vulnerabilidad y el riesgo corporal en el trabajo de campo. Los propósitos de este artículo son tres: (1) introducir el influyente papel de los asociados de investigación durante la producción y disseminación de conocimiento, (2) situar el trabajo de los asociados de investigación en el trabajo de campo y la literatura metodológica, y (3) problematizar la invisibilidad de los asociados de investigación en las publicaciones académicas y discutir posibles alternativas del modo como se acredita la erudición. **Palabras clave:** *asociados de investigación, geopolítica, metodología feminista, trabajo de campo, vulnerabilidad.*

“Doing fieldwork” includes various forms of reliance on local “insiders” who influence how we see and understand places. This article introduces these important, but often overlooked, actors—research associates—into methodological discussions about fieldwork. We emphasize the role and influence of those individuals who assist in various ways with the collection and interpretation of qualitative and ethnographic research data to extend existing conversations on their political and epistemological roles in the production of knowledge. We further discuss the complex vulnerabilities and power dynamics of working closely

with research associates in contexts where geopolitical interests muddle the already byzantine intricacies of negotiating research relationships across an array of differences. Although our arguments extend to various types of fieldwork, in this article we focus specifically on our experiences in international spaces, where, as outsiders, we relied on local research associates to help contextualize and navigate the process of collecting and interpreting research data.

We use the term *research associate* (rather than assistant) to encompass the array of individuals on whom researchers rely while conducting fieldwork. We challenge

unidirectional and hierarchical structures that place the researcher as expert and knowledge producer while obscuring the diversity of roles conducted by field associates. Research associate is used to resignify the relationship between researcher and hired individuals who assist in diverse ways, including the production of knowledge. We understand that simply changing a title does not erase the asymmetric power dynamics that exist during (and after) fieldwork. Therefore, we seek to destabilize power dynamics and hierarchies by widening the range of what is considered research assistance in the coproduction of knowledge.

Drawing on experiences in “the field” (as defined by Katz 1994; Nast 1994; Gupta and Ferguson 1997), we highlight how international geopolitics has been enmeshed in our encounters with research associates. These interactions render and reveal the complexities of vulnerability and corporeal risk during fieldwork. We draw on Koopman’s (2011) alter-geopolitics and Nagar’s (2014) radical vulnerability to suggest a new way to formally recognize the contributions of research associates—through the process of *production credits*. We argue that it is imperative to examine the geopolitical and collaborative nature of research and scholarship from inception to written conclusions. Vulnerabilities and dependencies during international fieldwork occur alongside intellectual stimulation and exhaustion, excitement and anxiety, and social awkwardness. Field researchers rarely if ever navigate the tumultuous path entirely on their own. Thus, we argue that collaborative efforts should be more acutely recognized both within and beyond academic articles and books.

### **Producing Knowledge and the Influential Role of Research Associates**

Historically, academic sciences maintained an aura of objectivity and authority that obscured the subjectivity and uncertainty involved in producing knowledge (Latour 1987). Challenging the “objectivity” of (social) science has included exploring and reflecting on research methods, subjectivity, self-reflexivity, and positionality as well as the ways in which knowledge is produced. The cultural turn in geography brought with it reflections on ethnographic writing (Geertz 1973; Clifford 1986; Cosgrove and Jackson 1987; Barnett 1998). Feminist scholars contributed more nuanced understandings about the field and the power inequalities therein (England 1994; Katz 1994; Nast 1994; Sharp and Dowler 2011). Haraway (1988) further problematized objectivity in the production of knowledge through her critique of the “god-trick” and a “view from nowhere.” Her concept, *situated knowledges*, identified the production of knowledge as spatially situated, thoughtful to power hierarchies and structures, and dedicated to rendering visible the claims of marginalized individuals and groups with less power (McDowell 1992; Rose 1997).

Following these critiques of objectivity and unquestioned authority in research practices over the last two decades, human geographers have developed more reflexive tools and concepts aimed at better understanding the production of knowledge during fieldwork and through the process of writing (Staheli and Lawson 1995; DeLyser et al. 2010; Routledge and Derickson 2015). Critical examinations about how we produce knowledge through situated positionalities, research practices, and representations have been transformational to field research. The 2017 special issue of *The Professional Geographer* highlights feminist geographers’ commitment to grappling with the complexities and power dynamics inherent in any fieldwork research (Goerisch 2016; Coddington 2017; Hiemstra 2017; Hiemstra and Billo 2017; Mukherjee 2017; Parker 2017; Whitson 2017). Although these interventions are essential, there remains limited engagement with the multiple actors (especially nonacademics) who participate in the research process and influence how we produce knowledge. We argue that recognizing situated knowledges leads to understanding the expansive ways in which research associates influence how we conceptualize, collect, interpret, and produce knowledge.

Research associates have a complex and at times complicated role and influence on the collection and interpretation of research data. Researchers often rely on associates’ “local” knowledge because they live in the spaces that researchers inhabit for relatively short periods of time. Local research associates take on multiple roles as helpers, drivers, key informants, gatekeepers, fixers, archivists, and handlers. They provide language and cultural translations, help negotiate spaces and situations, and solve problems as they arise. Fertaly, for example, spent hours reviewing transcripts with her associates who would mark up the texts with key insights in language. Those discussions, driven by the questions, concerns, and reflections of the research associates, shaped the first author’s analyses of collected data. Beyond research activities, associates provide care when our physical bodies fail us. For example, when the second author became severely dehydrated during field research, she relied on a research associate with previous experience as an emergency room nurse to provide her with intravenous fluids. Research associates act as motivators, confidants, guides, and protectors. We highlight their work as paid employees whose labor requires care, flexibility, and skill. The complexities of their roles reveal both the politics and power dynamics of working relationships between researchers and associates as complex and multidimensional.

Unfortunately, research associates often remain overlooked because of the academy’s ambivalent attitude toward them. First, their roles are often assumed to be relatively unskilled and distanced from the intellectual labor of the researcher. Yet as the two preceding examples suggest, research associates provide a complexity of intellectual and emotional

contributions. Second, acknowledging that one works with a research associate might suggest weakness on the part of the lead researcher and can raise uncomfortable questions about their own competence (Middleton and Cons 2014). Such acknowledgments can provide an opening for colleagues and peers to judge one's preparedness for the field, thus leading researchers to obscure rather than acknowledge the role of research associates. Ambivalent attitudes toward the contributions of research associates have reproduced heroic narratives of a "lone wolf" researcher and stymie sincere discussion about the contributions of research associates, perpetuating their invisibility in the literature (Rosaldo 1989). Third, there remains precious little space within academic publications to address the full complexity of research associates' work beyond mention in the acknowledgments.

A special issue of the journal *Ethnography* (2014) recently addressed the significant contributions of research assistants. Starting with a definition of the field as a "network of connections" rather than a bounded space, Gupta (2014, 399) identified research associates as key social and spatial navigators in opening up these networks. Cons (2014) identified dependency as integral to the researcher–associate relationship. Approaching dependency as more complex than mere deficiencies, inadequacies, or limitations, he suggested that researchers should seriously engage with the politics of dependency to more fully understand the "quixotic production of ethnographic knowledge" (390). Understanding this quixotic production includes extensive dialogues with associates, who in the process of providing assistance have also significantly influenced the researcher's knowledge and understanding. The multifaceted work by research associates should be considered along with how these relationships grow, change, and could become one of collaboration, further underscoring the role of research associates in the production of knowledge (Middleton and Pradhan 2014).

### Situating Research Associates

Feminist geographers provide several conceptual tools and key interventions that support our claim for more collaborative work with research associates. Drawing on these approaches, we highlight the political, epistemological, and ethical reasons for including research associates and their contributions to the production of academic knowledge. Feminist geographers emphasize the need to move toward situated, highly dynamic and collaborative research grounded in coauthorship with research participants (Rose 1997; Pratt 2002; Nagar and Sangtin Writers 2006; Koopman 2011; Nagar 2014; Mountz et al. 2015). Following this, we contend that a feminist ethics of care can serve to highlight the role of research associates in our work (Lawson 2007, 2009; Dowler, Cuomo, and Liberte 2014; Mountz et al. 2015). Caring for others and ourselves is an integral part of producing scholarship that counters the

neoliberalization of research and education by offering different methods of valuing and experiencing productivity regimes (Mountz et al. 2015).

Other feminist work argues that situated knowledges, intersubjectivity, dependency, and reflexivity are essential strategies for effective research (Haraway 1988; McDowell 1992, 1999; Rose 1997; Moss 2002; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010). Feminist reflections on fieldwork discuss how to effectively communicate across social, cultural, and language barriers (Nagar 2002; Pratt 2002; Mountz et al. 2003). Positionality and reflexivity have become hallmarks of feminist research methods despite their limitations (Staeheli and Lawson 1995; Rose 1997). From various methodological approaches and debates, it is abundantly clear that producing knowledge remains fraught with chaotic entanglements from how best to represent other places and people to effectively practicing "situated solidarities" (Nagar 2014; Routledge and Derickson 2015).

Nagar and the Sangtin Writers (2006) used the term *situated solidarities* in a poignant narrative about the complications of fieldwork, especially collaborative efforts through activism, to highlight the complications of solidarity work across social, political, spatial, and economic differences and distances. As part of situated solidarities, Nagar (2014) argued for practicing radical vulnerability, "a politics of indeterminacy, or a politics without guarantees" (13). Radical vulnerability exemplifies a feminist ethics of care as it recalibrates relational power imbalances (e.g., our visibility and the invisibility of research associates in published research) toward power balances. Nagar (2014) encouraged scholars to lay bare one's vulnerabilities through the acknowledgment of one's limitations. Radical vulnerability "requires all members of an alliance to open ourselves—intellectually and emotionally—to critique in ways that allow us to be interrogated and assessed by one another" (Nagar 2014, 23).

We view radical vulnerability and situated solidarities as essential for fieldwork and argue that these concepts should be included as part of the commitment to engaging in alter-geopolitics. Koopman (2011) defined alter-geopolitics as intertwining the everyday "to build alternative securities into and through dominant geopolitics" (277–80). Alternative securities include implementing one's corporeal privilege toward nonhierarchical relations. Thus, one way to challenge dominant geopolitics is to identify and discuss our reliance on field associates through practices of radical vulnerability that highlight the influences and work of research associates coupled with caring for others and acknowledging the need to be cared for by others.

During fieldwork, we have encountered situations where our research associates are socially, culturally, linguistically, or otherwise more adequately prepared than us. Research associates are often charged with doing more than arranging interviews or facilitating data collection, such as caring for our bodies and

health. We further draw attention to the extra care required from research associates when our bodies are beset by illness or unable to physically navigate spaces alone. Although these instances might indeed render visible our human vulnerabilities and unsettle conventional power hierarchies or dynamics, they regularly create additional work, stress, or sometimes embarrassment for local associates, further diverting their time away from their own families, communities, and leisure activities. While in the field we are often under the care and direction of research associates who operate as capable navigators and caregivers, safeguarding our health and security, while simultaneously ensuring access to research participants.

The spatial and situational dynamics during fieldwork place researchers in positions of power as well as dependence (Carretta and Jokinen 2017). For example, we might be able to access hospitals, clinics, and medicines that are locally expensive through the insurance our funding agencies or universities provide to ensure our safety in the event of a disaster, uncertainty, or conflict. Our corporeal needs provide a continual reminder of our physical vulnerabilities and that of our research associates and participants. Attending to our needs underscores our differential access to resources and mobility and reminds us that we must regularly engage with shifting and multiple complexities of power, care, and vulnerability during fieldwork.

We draw on the notion of *power geometries* to theorize shifting experiences of power relations while conducting fieldwork (Massey 1994). Although we might be in spatial, situational, or corporeal positions of power compared to our research associates, experiences of power and vulnerability change temporally and spatially throughout the research process. At times researchers can be in situations of powerlessness and reliance on research associates in ways that require humility, vulnerability, and care (Carretta and Jokinen 2017). Mobility and the control over one's mobility can reflect and reinforce hierarchical power relations, whereas in other instances they can shift power to research associates who have more knowledge, ability, and experience to navigate researchers' mobility through unfamiliar spaces (Massey 1994). Therefore, although our experiences might render us vulnerable in the field (whether we actively choose this or not), we travel to other countries with the geopolitics of our respective state policies, procedures, and processes of economic, political, and military interventions. We continually reinscribe the complexities of these power dynamics onto our relationships, placing research associates as coproducers of knowledge in our publications, Web sites, blogs, teaching, and so on. To incorporate radical vulnerability and alter geopolitics into international fieldwork, we argue that as researchers, we must be willing to acknowledge our place within a cadre of associates and influences, rather than remaining in a hierarchal position as sole authors or lone researchers. This means pushing back against mainstream academic metrics that position our "words" as counting more (see Koopman 2011, 280).

## **Geopolitics of Field Workers: Bodies and Entanglements**

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Social science disciplines, including geography, have a sordid history of being integral to colonial, imperial, and now neocolonial processes and procedures. Although we might view our scholarship as anti-imperial and anticolonial, we operate within the spaces beset on by corporate, multinational nongovernmental organizations, government, and militaries that might use similar research methods. Additionally, our bodies are marked by privileges associated with our corporeality as well as our national and university affiliations. Embracing the practice of alter-geopolitics and radical vulnerability provides a framework for engaging more ethically, thoughtfully, and equally during the processes of collecting, analyzing, and writing up our data.

The geopolitics of research begins with funding sources. When field research is funded by governments or foundations engaged in imperialist geopolitics or neoliberal economics, we must consider that our research strategies might generate concern from research associates and participants. The first author's research was directly supported by two U.S. government agencies—Fulbright III administered by the U.S. Department of State and the congressionally funded National Science Foundation. As further discussed later, the first author's academic associations with these U.S. institutions led to suspicions about the intentions of her research and caused complications for those with whom she worked.

Another layer of complication to the geopolitics of research focuses on our research and data collection practices, which at times mirror the information gathering techniques long used by intelligence and military personnel. For example, Verdery (2014) compared the practices of ethnographers with those of communist Romania's secret police to illustrate the use of similar techniques (i.e., collecting information about everyday behaviors and interpreting that evidence). Our field research methods might echo those of government surveillance and other tactics of everyday exploitation (Price 2016). Although research participants are offered (limited) protections by institutional review board protocols and procedures, research associates often take additional risks as our hired employees, beyond what they expected or anticipated.

Acknowledging the inherent and at times insidious geopolitics of research requires a continual and iterative ethical process toward research integrity, the protection and care of our research associates and participants, and critical reflection (Koopman 2011). Thus, we must make careful decisions about what we write or do not write, using purposeful silences to avoid the misuse of our research results and analyses (Coddington 2017). Even if our research remains staunchly critical of the military or multinational institutions and corporations, Koopman (2016) reminded us that it can be weaponized without our knowledge or consent (also see Katz 1994). We are already engaged in a difficult dance between

contributing to the production of knowledge in the academy and protecting our research data, associates, and participants, particularly when militarized geopolitical actions and discourses are generated from our home country. Crediting research associates' work in the production of knowledge attends to feminist care ethics by highlighting the contributions of research associates without exposing them to censure or harm within their own countries or by ours.

In the following, we describe experiences from the field in which bodies, marked by geopolitics, move through complicated power dynamics and attend to mutual vulnerabilities and dependencies. For the first author, a new understanding of vulnerability and dependency complexities in the field came to her attention after an encounter where she was accused of being a spy sent to destroy Armenian families, and her research associate, Siran, was called a traitor to her country. The second author discusses different conceptualizations of corporeal geopolitics combined with conflicting situated knowledges about how her body should traverse public spaces in Kabul, Afghanistan.

In 2016, the first author organized several focus group discussions with women in Yerevan, Armenia, to discuss changes in their ideas about family, women's rights, and everyday domestic life as part of her dissertation fieldwork research. During one such meeting, a young woman participant accused the first author and her research associate Siran of sabotage and treason, respectively. Initially, these accusations were restrained and made before the formal discussion began. As the focus group continued, however, the young woman interrupted the conversation to object to the discussion, accusing the first author of being a spy sent to destroy Armenian families. She stated that she was opposed to foreigners knowing about the traditions and conceptions of Armenian families and suspected that the focus group discussion would be used to create a plan to further sabotage Armenian family values.

Such accusations directed toward field researchers are not uncommon, and this instance was not the only time a participant suspected the first author of being a foreign agent. This encounter had a more immediate and longer term impact on Siran, however. Siran worked at the same institution as the young woman and shared office space with her. Using humor to describe the new situation that she faced in her workplace, Siran joked to the first author, "There's a new Cold War." Siran lost friendships over the accusations of working with a foreign agent and faced indictments of distrust and questionable behavior from both "sides" of the dispute. Eventually she had to request a change of offices to avoid further conflict. Being called a spy during fieldwork might, at different times, fall along a spectrum from humorous to threatening for the researcher. This example underscores how researchers and their associates remain entangled in geopolitics. The first author was nearly entirely reliant on Siran's organizational skills to assemble the focus groups necessary for data collection, and yet her positionality as a U.S. researcher in a foreign context meant that Siran had to face damaging accusations and exclusions.

In another example, the second author was in Kabul during Eid celebrations and chose to spend part of the day with her friend and research associate Hamid and his family and part of the day with another research associate, Asan and his family. When Asan arrived at Hamid's house to take her to his celebration, he insisted that she wear a burqa during the forty-minute trip to his cousin's home. Hamid was upset by this suggestion. In Kabul, at that time, many Afghan women wore burqas, but it was not common among international workers. Hamid assumed that the burqa would upset the second author and therefore advocated on her behalf, insisting that she did not need to wear the burqa.

Hamid's family believed that it was inappropriate to ask the second author to wear a burqa, whereas Asan's family believed that this was necessary to ensure both her and their security. The discussions continued between the two families, until they finally agreed that she would leave Hamid's house wearing her usual Afghan clothes and headscarf and then once in Asan's family car she would don the burqa. As she prepared to leave and said her goodbyes to Hamid's family, he privately expressed his concern for her safety. Once in the car, Asan suggested that she not visit with Hamid's family again. Although the second author knew both men and their families well, they did not know each other and therefore both held suspicions articulated by way of concern for her safety. Whether or not she wore a burqa outer garment reflected competing situated knowledges about dress, gender, and mobility in public space between the two families, as influenced by changing geopolitics in Kabul at that time.

The geopolitics of this situation was further revealed through conversations about the second author's international body and how it should be revealed or concealed in different spaces. Hamid's family viewed her international-ness as a benefit and a way to ensure security due to the extensive number of internationals in the city at that time, whereas Asan viewed this as a liability because of the concurrent threats and attacks against internationals. The second author trusted both Hamid and Asan because of her working relationships with each of them. Vulnerability in this situation included her silence and agreement, which came with a profound realization that her corporeal presence continually created anxiety among her research associates, particularly when their situated knowledges were both accurate and divergent.

Conducting social science research is by definition an act of geopolitics. Critical research on dominant systems of governance, economics, or social structures requires a certain level of social and political acumen to navigate through the difficult spaces of fieldwork geopolitics. Researchers must take precautions to avoid assumptions about fieldwork solidarities and divergent political positions. Navigating the difficult terrain of fieldwork geopolitics requires practice and experience. Scholars at all levels, however, need the assistance of local researchers and research associates to help them navigate and negotiate the challenges of fieldwork geopolitics and data collection. These examples illustrate

the ways in which local social, cultural, and political differences are played out through our bodies in the field. They identify researchers' dependence on associates in foreign spaces and the unintended and often unexpected risks that associates face while performing this work. These examples brought to the authors' attention the need to recognize the mutual vulnerabilities produced and experienced between researchers and research associates and their contributions to researchers' analyses and publications.

## Rethinking Academic Recognition: Production Credits

Successful research depends on collaboration. Yet despite this, academic expectations in human geography do not provide space for fair and accurate representations of research associates. The expectations within social science departments often privilege single-authored articles and manuscripts (Holmberg 2014). As Gupta (2014) noted, "[The] claim to sole authorship is always fictional," given the significant collaboration that goes into the process beginning with grant proposals before fieldwork begins, to research associates, translators, and transcribers in the field, to writing groups and feedback from colleagues, advisors, and reviewers during the writing process (394). Currently, however, journals and other academic publications do not provide a space alongside the author's byline to identify the work conducted by research associates.

There are two approaches to the question of how to acknowledge collaboration and multiple forms of contribution in scholarly works. The first is to expand the concept and forms of authorship so that multiple people can be included and their roles specified. The second is a radical move that would do away with authorship altogether, arguably letting resulting research stand on its own (Gupta 2014). Although radically rethinking authorship is an intriguing argument, we advocate for acknowledging the specific contributions of different individuals through an expanded form of authorship credits. We suggest moving from informal recognition

(i.e., acknowledgments) to formal recognition through named collaboration, coauthorship, and production credits (also see Holmberg 2014). Production credits (see Table 1) provide up-front identification of research associates within academic articles and books. Production credits provide a space for identifying the multiple influences and contributors to the production of knowledge. This "credit" further expands the concept of situated knowledge by attending to its multiplicity, and identifying individuals involved in shaping a researcher's final product even when they are not directly involved in writing. Production credits, if they become a regular part of academic publishing, can serve to institutionalize formal recognition of research associates while retaining the expectation of authorship that is likely to endure within the academy.

Providing additional publication space to credit and identify the various individuals and groups involved in the production of knowledge can be an example of alter-geopolitical practice because it disrupts spatial, social, political, and economic hierarchies of the increasingly neoliberal university and politicization of research. Production credits attend to power geometries inherent in the collection of research data, analysis, and dissemination of results by explicitly acknowledging the various contributions of multiple actors involved in the research process. Rather than rendering invisible or relegating research associates (or participants) to acknowledgments, we seek to push for a forum for addressing and calling attention to their work in our publications and as coproducers of knowledge.

## Conclusion

Nagar (2002) wrote, "Reflexivity in U.S. academic writing has mainly focused on examining the identities of individual researchers rather than on the way in which those identities intersect with institutional, geopolitical, and material aspects of their positionality" (182). This individualistic approach is inadequate because it does not account for difference among ethical, ontological, and material qualities of positionality (Hyndman 2007). In this article, we have extended feminist interventions into research methodologies by identifying the need to consider multiple geopolitical bodies and influences along with self-reflexivity and positionality in the field. We argue for space to properly credit research associates to call attention to their role as part of the complexities of vulnerability, dependence, and geopolitics in fieldwork. Not only do research associates make significant, yet overlooked, contributions to the knowledge we produce, but they assist and take care of our corporeal vulnerabilities, often at great risk to themselves given the tumultuous geopolitical terrain of international fieldwork. Researchers carry various representations (and consequences) of geopolitics to the field despite (or perhaps because of) our commitment to ethical data collection. As an alter-geopolitical research practice, we argue for expanding the ways in which we acknowledge our

**Table 1** Production credits example

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Research Associates, Afghanistan

Najibullah: Fixer, caregiver, translator, collaborator

Asan: Research assistance

Hamid: Research assistance

Farid: Driver and research assistance

Sakhi: Research and translation assistance

Karima: Research associate

Research Associates, Armenia

Victoria Asatryan: Collaborator, translator, research assistance

Sona Avagyan: Translator, caregiver, research assistance

Shushan Ghazaryan: Collaborator, caregiver, research assistance, translator

research associates in the coproduction of knowledge and their epistemological and ontological presence throughout the research process in and beyond “the field.”

Providing an institutionalized space for identifying the contributions of research associates through production credits is one method for drawing attention to their contributions and the embodied geopolitics of any fieldwork project. We recognize that this might be a nominal acknowledgment of their roles and does not fully address the skill, care, and assumption of risk that they undertake, nor does it have the capacity to resolve the geopolitical complications that we have identified. We further acknowledge the limitations of this form of authorship, particularly for research associates who prefer or need to remain anonymous for reasons of job, social, cultural, or political security. Therefore, in addition to calling for institutional change within publications, we advocate for fellow researchers to write the bodies and contributions of research associates into their final works through “thick” ethnographic descriptions that include rather than exclude research associates (Geertz 1973). Giving attention to research associates through production credits and thick description provides space for explicitly addressing the multiple actors involved in the collection and analyses of data. Finally, we seek to render ourselves radically vulnerable and engage in alter-geopolitics by incorporating the multiple ways research associates influence and contribute to the production of knowledge. ■

## Research Associates

Research Associates, Afghanistan. Najibullah: Fixer, caregiver, translator, collaborator. Asan: Research associate. Hamid: Research associate. Farid: Driver. Sakhi: Research associate, translator. Karima: Research associate. Research Associates, Armenia. Victoria Asatryan: Collaborator, translator, research assistance. Sona Avagyan: Translator, caregiver, research assistance. Shushan Ghazaryan: Collaborator, translator, caregiver, research assistance.


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