

**Former Extremist Interviews Current Extremist  
Self-disclosure and Emotional Engagement in Terrorism Studies**  
Necef, Mehmet Ümit

*Published in:*  
Studies in Conflict & Terrorism

*DOI:*  
[10.1080/1057610X.2020.1799516](https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1799516)

*Publication date:*  
2020

*Document version:*  
Accepted manuscript

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Necef, M. Ü. (2020). Former Extremist Interviews Current Extremist: Self-disclosure and Emotional Engagement in Terrorism Studies. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 44(1), 74-92.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1799516>

Go to publication entry in University of Southern Denmark's Research Portal

**Terms of use**

This work is brought to you by the University of Southern Denmark.  
Unless otherwise specified it has been shared according to the terms for self-archiving.  
If no other license is stated, these terms apply:

- You may download this work for personal use only.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying this open access version

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details and we will investigate your claim.  
Please direct all enquiries to [puresupport@bib.sdu.dk](mailto:puresupport@bib.sdu.dk)

## **Former Extremist Interviews Current Extremist: Self-disclosure and Emotional Engagement in Terrorism Studies**

**Key words:** Autoethnography, self-disclosure, emotional recall, Islamic State, islamist terrorism, phenomenological method

### **Abstract**

In this article I describe how recognizing elements from my own extremist past made me emotional while interviewing a jailed terrorist about his motivations for joining Islamic State. I relate how this mood led me to an uncontrolled self-disclosure and recount how he agreed to elaborate on his motivations for joining IS, despite initial reluctance to talk about them. Then, I present some considerations on whether research in which emotional attachment is involved can produce critical scientific knowledge. The basic aim of the article is to develop methods, concepts and means to contribute to research on the motivations of terrorists.

### **Introduction**

After many months of effort I finally stand in front of the entrance to the top security prison Enner Mark in Denmark to interview Enes Ciftci, a 26-year old young man of Turkish-Kurdish origin. Ciftci has been jailed for 6 years for travelling to Syria to fight for Islamic State (IS) and supporting IS economically. He had answered positively to my request to visit him. I had written to him directly, not using official channels, a method which turned out to be wise. However, it took me a whole 9 months to get the official permissions to visit and interview him. First, it took a couple of months for my university's judicial department to send me an approval of my research

proposal. After that, it took many letters and telephone calls – and several months - to get the permission of the Danish Prison Service for the visit. It took another several months to get the permission to record interviews using a dictaphone in the prison. The reason behind all this bureaucracy was apparently the fact that I wanted to interview not only a convicted, but possibly more importantly, an unrepentant terrorist, who did not refrain from using the media to present his views to a wider audience.<sup>i</sup>

Standing in front of Denmark's top security prison, I felt that I had taken a great step by coming so far, not only logistically but also psychologically. Since I had decided to conduct research on Islamist terrorism in 2016, it took me almost a year to dare to contact a jailed person or somebody sharing sympathies with IS. It has to be taken into consideration that 2016 was, in retrospect, the middle of IS's heyday, that is the period between 2014 when IS had declared the Caliphate and the end of 2017 when it began to lose ground. I had read articles about a French woman journalist who had to go underground during her investigative journalism on IS in France because IS suspected her of being a spy. Naturally I did not want to end up in such a situation, for example due to some misunderstanding between IS members or sympathizers and myself. I was concerned that they would suspect me of somehow working undercover for the security forces. However, my conversations with a group of Afghani and Palestinian students at my university convinced me that approaching IS members or sympathizers for interviews would not be that dangerous. The students told me that the young Muslims they knew who sympathized with violent jihadism would love to "pour their hearts out" to an older man, an academic of Turkish origin whom they would presume to be some kind of Muslim. Moreover, they argued, they would love to proselytize and try to win me over to their points of view.

However, it was difficult to contact and conduct interviews with first-hand sources who were directly involved in Islamist terrorism.<sup>ii</sup> My efforts to contact people who have been in Syria

or Iraq to fight for IS or sympathizers who were planning to leave Denmark to join IS did not bear fruit. I approached through common acquaintances some persons who I was told had been in Syria or Iraq, but they declined to speak with me. Their presence in Syria or Iraq was a part of their lives they would rather repress, and they were not prepared to risk in any way attracting the attention of the authorities. These were concerns which I respected. I spoke with and conducted interviews with people who knew young men and women who had been in Syria as foreign fighters, but though their knowledge and considerations were valuable, I reckoned that talking directly with first-hand sources was much more reliable especially since the aim of my research was to study the motivations to join IS.

I visited Ciftci four times in December 2017 and in January, February and March 2018, each visit lasting approximately three hours. After the second visit I finally got the permission from the Prison Service to have a dictaphone (no mobile phones) with me to record the interviews. All in all, I have 6 hours of recorded interview in which Ciftci elaborated on his family and social background and on his motivations to support IS.

After the first visit, I immediately wrote a letter to Prison Service requesting to visit three other inmates either sentenced or waiting to be sentenced for terrorism. Unfortunately, I got a discouraging answer: “Dear Mr. Necef, I have forwarded your enquiry about expanding your research by including more inmates sentenced for terrorism. The Security Concern (*Koncern Sikkerhed*) has rejected it with reference to order and security considerations” (email from Prison Service, 5 December 2017). My appeals to various authorities, ministries and people in charge of anti-radicalization programs were in vain. “Order and security considerations” were apparently a difficult hurdle to overcome. Since the rejection, several colleagues and a journalist told me that they also could not get permission to visit inmates sentenced for terrorism.

The authorities' ban on visiting and interviewing inmates has rendered my interviews with Ciftci unique. My writing directly to him and circumventing Prison Service and all other authorities turned out to be the right decision at the right time. Several researchers have conducted interviews with IS or other violent Islamist groups in prisons in various European countries.<sup>iii</sup> However, my interviews with Ciftci, as far as I know, are unique in the Danish context.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Encountering Enes Ciftci**

I myself had been involved in extreme left-wing activities in the beginning of the 1970s and jailed for a year and a half in Turkey. I had been placed in interrogation cells in Antakya and Adana, then brought to Mamak Military Prison in Ankara and some months later to Selimiye Military Prison in Istanbul. At the gate of Enner Mark Prison near the Danish town of Horsens, the memories flood back. It will be the first time I am in a prison since 1974 and in a prison cell since 1980 - when I came to Sweden in October 1980 to ask for political asylum, I was sent back to Denmark and had to spend a night in a cell in custody in Copenhagen.

Life is a strange thing. You become part of a violent revolutionary organization when you are 18 years old and this madness goes on for five years. Then you stand in front of a Danish prison at the age of 64 as an associate professor at a Danish university as part of a research group studying why some young Muslims are drawn to violent jihadism. I am filled with angst. Why on earth did I misuse so many years of my life believing in an extreme version of Marxism? How many years do I have left to live? What is the meaning of being thrown into this world, into a particular family, city, country and social environment? Was there a meaning behind all this at all?

Sitting face to face with Ciftci for the first time in the visiting room of the prison – he and I alone with just a little table between us - I did my best to suppress my angst, my sentiments and all these thoughts. I repeated to myself that I needed to keep a cool head and ask the right questions.

This was research and I was proud to be the first researcher talking to a convicted terrorist in Denmark. It should be noted that this Islamist, a supporter of Islamic terrorism, had nothing to do with me either politically or socially. We belonged to different worlds. I was now a secular liberal democrat, and he was a supporter of violent jihadism. I kept on saying to myself, “keep your angst and emotions to yourself and conduct your objective scientific research”. Moreover, I was concerned for my safety. Six months before my visit, Natasha Colding-Olsen, also convicted of terrorism in relation to IS, had stabbed an employee with a piece of mirror she had hidden in her sleeve at the incarceration facility, wounding him seriously. Shortly after the attack, the police found a letter in her cell addressed to Ciftci, no less, in which she explained that the reason for the attack was that the man had served as a soldier in Iraq. Now the most important thing was that this visit did not escalate into a safety problem for me.<sup>v</sup> Wild scenarios were swirling in my head. How much does he know about me? My past and my views on religion and IS? What if he attacks me with a hidden weapon – just like Colding-Olsen? What if he takes me hostage? Will my ethnographic work escalate into some kind of “ethnography at the edge”?<sup>vi</sup> It did not help my anxieties that the prison guard who took me to the visiting room before fetching Ciftci showed me two buttons on the wall and said that I should press the green one if my visit lasted shorter than expected, and the red one “in case of emergency”. Moreover, I was advised to sit near the buttons. I did not dare to ask what kind of emergency could arise. However, I would soon experience that my intention to keep a cool head, ignore my angst and repress my feelings would be thwarted, as he began telling me why and how he was gradually drawn to Islamic State (IS). How his aims in life changed. How he had everything - money, job, car, property in Turkey. “But,” he added, “there was a hole in me, an emptiness. I lacked something I could identify with. Then I found Islam. And people who not only talked about Islam, but who also acted in accordance with their convictions”.

In this paper I describe how recognizing elements from my own extremist past made me emotional and introspective while interviewing a jailed terrorist about his motivations for joining Islamic State. I relate how this mood led me to an uncontrolled self-disclosure, and how this eased the tension between us. I recount how he agreed to elaborate on his motivations for joining IS, despite initial reluctance to talk about them. Then, I present some considerations on whether research in which emotional attachment and self-disclosure are involved can produce critical scientific knowledge. I draw partly on phenomenological tradition which insists on the necessity of being aware of one's moods and sentiments while conducting research. The basic aim of the article is to develop methods, concepts and means to contribute to research on the motivations of Islamist terrorists.

### **The Emotional Recall of “The Empty Hole Inside of Me”**

When I visited Ciftci in prison for the first time, I told him that I was interested in his motivations as well as his background and asked his permission to record the interviews. He was reticent to speak about his motivations, since his explanations allegedly could be used to change the minds of young Muslims who wanted to do the *hijra* (the journey to the Islamic Caliphate). “More importantly”, he said, “I must first ask permission from my leaders in Raqqa to speak with you, since I have given them my *baya* (pledge of obedience).” Moreover, the “leadership” would also check if I was trustworthy. All this made me quite distressed as I had spent so much time and energy on getting permission from the Danish authorities to visit him and make a recorded interview. Now I had to wait for permission from Raqqa. I also did not like the idea of being “security-cleared” by an organization like Islamic State.<sup>vii</sup>

However, I requested that he share his motivations with me and suggested I could record him another time, when he had permission from Raqqa. He complied and began to elaborate on ‘the

hole' in himself. Here is the central part of his reflections which changed the course of my research:<sup>viii</sup>

Enes Ciftci: There was an empty hole inside of me and it disappeared when I found Islam. When I found the hole, it dawned on me that there should be boundaries and moral principles in life.

Necef: Why was there an empty hole? Can you describe it? What was it all about?

Enes Ciftci: I believe that everybody has asked himself the question. What is the meaning of life? Where are we heading, and can we get answers to the big questions we have in life?

What is the whole thing about? I mean is it about getting up at 8 and being at school until 3, finding an after-school job for a couple of hours and come home and eat well and that's it?

OK, one can maybe do this for a day, a week, a month, a year, ten years, but isn't there something which is greater than this? There must be guidance here in life, there must be a place where it is written that you should live your life like this and here are the rules of the game. I don't think that it is just a coincidence that the responsibility of your life is left on your own shoulders. There are different answers to the big problems of life. If you ask ten people, you'll get different answers. The majority will certainly say it is one's family one must devote oneself to, love people around you and strive to acquire as many worldly goods as possible. Money, status, power or property. You can buy a great car, I did that too. But I didn't find happiness, I didn't find happiness in material goods, I simply didn't. When I was young I got a brand-new car, I was self-employed, my pockets were full of money, we owned a house. Both in Turkey and in Denmark. My family own the house they live in. I started sort of thinking that there must be something greater than all this. I thought I can't just follow the same footsteps as my ancestors. I have witnessed several deaths where I thought, "so that was his life, what did he achieve in life, where will he go now, what will



happen to him now?” Suddenly all the goods he owned, they can’t save him now, where he lies there alone in his grave. So, the things he chased after in life, he cannot take them with himself (to the afterlife – Necef). We are so busy in this world to chase, chase and chase and we do everything to find happiness, but we forget just to stop and see what we already have achieved and be grateful. It was just at that point I found Islam, where I found Allah and it is Him I thank for my good and bad times. That way I received guidance and I didn’t have that before”.

Now, something unexpected happened. I began to think of my youth. The more Ciftci explained the more I remembered how I myself thought, felt and behaved when I was a young revolutionary. This experience of reminiscing during research is what Ellis in her methodological novel calls a process of “emotional recall”.<sup>ix</sup> It was as if I was seeing daylight, and similarities between us were slowly dawning upon me. I imagined I was back in Turkey at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s “emotionally and physically”.<sup>x</sup> While Ciftci was explaining the reasons for joining IS, I said to myself, “He is talking as I did when I was 18 - minus the religious wording”. The more he talked about “the hole in me” as the main reason for his decision to leave his family, his fiancé and his work to fight for IS at the age of 21, the more I was touched, and I became emotional. I remembered the ‘hole’ in myself, when I decided to be a communist professional revolutionary at the age of 18. I had a similar “existential emptiness” inside of me when I was in my late teens. To fill the gap, I had abandoned my family and dropped out of university and became a ‘professional revolutionary’ in 1970, as we called it at the end of 1960s and in the 1970s. I was both studying at the high school and working as a political activist, but the idea of becoming a full time ‘revolutionary’ had not emerged until 1970. Likewise, Ciftci had left his family and his pizzeria business. He travelled to Syria a week after his engagement to a girl.<sup>xi</sup>

## **Self-disclosure**

I was so moved by Ciftci's description of the frame of mind he was in that deep inside I felt the urge to share with him that I had also left my family and university to fight full-time for the ideals I believed in. It was so alarming that I thought I must control myself not to display my emotions. Within a few seconds a number of reservations crossed my mind. First, why should I share an important aspect of my past with a total stranger? And moreover, I was not sure about how he would react. Secondly, this was not an "Ex-extremists Anonymous" meeting, but Scientific research. Finally, what if he in some way uses this information against me?

However, I ended up telling him that I also had left my family and university to join a group aiming at violent revolution when I was 18 years old. Thus, from my own part our being together still developed into some kind of "Ex-extremists Anonymous" meeting. I had in 1975 gone through what Ebaugh calls "role exit", which she defines as "(t)he process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role".<sup>xiii</sup> Ciftci's first reaction was, "Were you also fighting against the cruel system, elder brother?". I felt that he became relieved and even happy to hear this, and I could sense his face radiated. Now we had something in common. In his eyes I had probably transformed from being an aloof researcher into a person who in his youth also fought against the Turkish state and therefore to somebody who no longer could allow himself to see him as an abnormality. It was as if in his universe I had become somebody to admire. We both were involved in some struggle with different aims, but the most important thing for him was apparently that we both were involved in some struggle. In a way, I had become an "insider".

Writing about her research on religious orders in the United States in the 1970s, Ebaugh, herself an ex-nun, writes: "Social research on the part of 'outsiders' was still seen at that time as a threat to a cloistered, spiritually ordained institution. As an insider, I not only gained access but was

welcomed as someone who might help religious orders understand what was happening”.<sup>xiii</sup> I am not sure, whether I have contributed to Ciftci’s introspection, but his seeing me as some kind of fellow-traveler towards a similar destiny created a mood in which he felt at ease to be more open to me. After his surprise at learning that I also had been involved in a violent group, he wanted to know more. His second question surprised me: “Were you and your friends also fighting against the *taghut* (earthly tyrannical power), Erdogan (the Turkish president)?”. I said: “No, Erdogan was just 16 years old in 1970”. Though I tried to stop myself saying it, I nevertheless blurted out: “Shame on you, you don’t even know the history of the country you stem from”. His reaction, as I expected, was a broad smile and said “I promise I will read some books about Turkish history. Which ones would you recommend, my teacher?”

When he smiled, I could see the shy young man in him hidden well behind the appearance of the tough warrior. Yes, he was an IS-warrior, but he was still talking with a man much older than him. Later, I thought that I was unconsciously making use of the fact that we both hailed from Turkey where the relations between generations were more hierarchical than in late modern societies such as Denmark.

I felt as if the ice between us – the ice between the researcher and the interviewee - was being broken, and our interaction began to take on a rather more relaxed and cordial, in fact more human, character.

It was especially Ciftci’s critique of “the hunt for money, status, power and property” and his statement that “I did not find happiness in material good”, in his defense of self-sacrifice for the cause one believes in that had touched me. He was repeating almost word for word what I and my revolutionary comrades were saying at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s. The ideal of heroic martyrdom and the unimportance and unworthiness of one’s own life and looking down on the

majority of people who were in the business of living their normal lives, were the constitutive elements of the mood among the revolutionary youth. These ideals are still dominant among left-wing radicals and extremists today in Turkey and all over the world no matter what their ideology is.<sup>xiv</sup> “Heroic martyrdom” is one of the key attractions of not only violent jihadism, but any kind of ideology which espouses violence to achieve political aims.

Apart from sacrificing his material comfort for the sake of joining the cause he believes in, Ciftci tried also to shame Muslim men for not joining the ranks with him. It has to be added that we, the left-wing radicals, used to do exactly the same in the 1960s and the 1970s. In an open letter to the Danes, Ciftci appealed directly to Muslim men in Denmark and criticized their conformism and lack of support for IS’s fight: “It is an honour to be together with loyal people. Brothers, who do not come with excuses, and who get up from their warm beds, when help is needed”.<sup>xv</sup> With these remarks Ciftci was apparently trying to shame Muslim men and appeal to their bad conscience. The message between the lines seems to be that the Muslim men who don’t join IS are not real men, but just a bunch of disloyal, lazy, selfish and conformist cowards.<sup>xvi</sup>

Ciftci was no longer my ‘research object’, somebody whose beliefs I did not share in almost all respects, a young man who in my eyes had already damaged his life, squandered his multiple possibilities in a liberal democratic and rich country as Denmark, somebody I had to inwardly condemn and perhaps have pity on, somebody I had to be afraid of, somebody whose movements in the visiting room I had to watch out for. Now he was a human being who had chosen a wrong path to realize his political and religious ideals, maybe a “lost soul” - just like me in my late teens. Gone was the detached researcher, in came the ex-extremist, trying to understand a current extremist and ending up feeling empathy for a convicted terrorist, whose ideology is far removed from where I stand. Gone was the “I have actually nothing to do with this guy, I have come only to understand him and write interesting texts which would help convince other young Muslims not to join the

ranks of IS” attitude, and in came a feeling of a fatherly solicitude. I kept on saying to myself, “He is destroying his youth, just like I did when I was young”. A sense of powerlessness arose too at not being able to do anything to save him from the deep-rooted ideas and beliefs he was entangled in.

My self-disclosure about my engagement with leftist extremism in my youth opened him up and my clear impression was that he began to trust me. Sharing my story apparently helped to “lessen the hierarchy”<sup>xvii</sup> in our interaction. The second time I visited him he expressed his happiness to see me again and began to confide in me. It was lunch time, and he came in with a tray of dishes he had cooked for me. I told him that I was still working on getting the permission from the authorities to record him. While eating and later drinking tea, he began to ask my advice about two personal issues. One of them was whether he should accept the authorities’ offer to sign a document where he renounces his right to ever return to Denmark, what he could do in Turkey and how he could make a living. The second one was of a much more private nature. He asked me whether it was a good idea to marry a young woman, also convicted of terrorism. Both questions I answered positively for he had told me that he hated being in prison, and I reckoned the chance that he would leave violent jihadism would be much higher if he started a family. I recommended that he, in that case, cut off all relations with violent politics and look after his family.

Thus, the research practice evolved to an emotional, introspective, nostalgic drama, which influenced the atmosphere of our being together in the cell and had a great impact on our relationship. My theoretical and self-controlled research glided into “lyrical sociology”, which is characterized by an engaged stance toward the object of analysis, by specific location of both its subject and its object in social space, and by a momentaneous conception of social time.<sup>xviii</sup> My ambition in research became the use of strong figuration and personification and an aim to communicate my emotional stance toward my object of study.

White underlines that the “best research on . . . political violence is undertaken by researchers who, on some level, interact with the people being researched”.<sup>xix</sup> This interaction, if done with due care, may build rapport and solidarity, and this may influence the researcher’s findings. However, in my view, White is mistaken in differentiating between investigating the people or movement under consideration, and the social science question at hand, as well as in his demand that the researcher should document the former. It was, at least in my case, difficult, if not impossible, to make this separation.

The mood I was in when I was in the visiting room with Ciftci at Enner Mark Prison, and especially my self-disclosure about my past, contributed to a great extent to a breakdown of the distance between he and I, that is the distance between objective researcher and terrorist being researched. The more he explained what he called “the hole in me”, the more I became contemplative. I remembered the time in my youth when I felt that emptiness in myself which had to be filled. I had filled the emptiness with a secular ideology with haughty claims and pretensions. The mood I was in cut through the dividing line between myself and the world. “Existence is not a subjective interior facing an exterior object. It is being-in-the world.”<sup>xx</sup> Moods are “the sustaining foundation of the soul” and they are “states of being, structuring and coloring human existence as a whole”.<sup>xxi</sup> Human existence is always already placed in some space, consequently humans’ life space is always already tuned. Human life is existence with things and with others in tuned life spaces.<sup>xxii</sup> Likewise, moods cut through the dividing line between Ciftci and I. I was in a cell with a young man convicted of terrorism, and we had in a way surrendered ourselves before each other. Moods were not only a part of the situation I was in, that is being together with a person convicted of terrorism, but one of the fundamental constituting elements of my comprehension of his and my own situation. My acknowledgement of Ciftci’s situation, motives and reasoning was unavoidably woven together with those moods woken in me by being with him.

Taking inspiration from Martin Heidegger's assertion that existence is always already *gestimmt* (attuned)<sup>xxiii</sup>, Bollnow states that there is absolutely no state of human life that is not already tuned in a certain way. How we face a thing and how it appears to us is from the outset determined by the state of *Stimmung* we are in".<sup>xxiv</sup> Likewise, we can say that a researcher in her meeting with an interviewee or during field work is always already attuned. A researcher can hardly escape dependence on moods and feelings in carrying out her research, for example by assuming "a purely theoretical stance whose perspective is not 'clouded' by *Stimmungen*".<sup>xxv</sup> The philosophical significance of *Stimmung* lies, according to Bollnow, "precisely in the fact that it goes beyond the separation of subject and object, which theoretical consciousness takes for granted, back into the level of an original unity between the two".<sup>xxvi</sup>

During our talk about his private affairs he addressed me cordially either as "elder brother" (*abi*) or as "teacher" (*hocam*)<sup>xxvii</sup>. I felt a natural respect towards me possibly due to the great difference in age. He never asked me about my religious beliefs, probably because he presumed I was Muslim due to my Turkish background and my self-evident Muslim name. Besides my ex-extremist position, my ethnic and religious background contributed apparently to my being considered as an "insider" by Ciftci. I think he thought it was improper, even impertinent, to examine a man about religious knowledge who was close to three times his own age. I made it clear to him from the start that I did not sympathize with IS and was against violent groups in principle. That was it, and he never asked me about my positions about politics. Thus, I was spared the problems the Swedish anthropologist Marco Nilsson had to face such as being asked about his knowledge of Islam and stances on various issues as well as drinking a lot of tea.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Orsini<sup>xxix</sup> summarizes the debate between ethnographers who subscribe to Kantian ethics and those who subscribe to utilitarianism. The first group insists that under no circumstances should persons interviewed be considered merely as a means to achieve scientific knowledge and should

never be lied to. On the other side, the utilitarians believe it is permissible to hide one's identity and real standpoint if one aims to advance knowledge on socially harmful individuals. To lie to Ciftci about my identity or my political views never crossed my mind.

I cannot stress enough that my self-disclosure was not an act of give-and-take calculation. It was a spontaneous reaction to a person's circumstances similar to mine half a century ago. Elaborating on how mutual self-revelation strengthens and deepens human interaction, Simmel writes that "obviously, all relations which people have to one another are based on their knowing something about one another".<sup>xxx</sup> For him it is evident that without some *personal knowledge at a certain level* a proper interaction cannot take place. He highlights that "in all relations of a personally differentiated sort, intensity and nuance develop in the degree in which each party, by words and by mere existence, reveals itself to the other".<sup>xxx</sup> In one of the early articles on self-disclosure in research Cozby wrote "(Simmel's) statement seems so intuitively obvious that it is surprising that there is not more research or theoretical development in the area of self-disclosure".<sup>xxxii</sup> Talking specifically about sociology and anthropology one can justifiably say that this lacuna has been filled by scholars working in the tradition of autoethnography.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Contemplating the role of one's past in a person's current interactions, Ebaugh writes: "... (T)he phenomenon of being an ex is sociologically and psychologically intriguing since it implies that interaction is based not only on current role definitions but, more important, past identities that somehow linger on and define how people see and present themselves in their present identities".<sup>xxxiv</sup> It has to be added, in the light of my interaction with Ciftci, that the past also plays a role in how one is seen.

Ellis recounts a discussion between two students on self-disclosure. While interviewing women with breast cancer, Valerie, who is a breast cancer survivor herself, tells the women her own



story to stimulate their story. Another student, Jack, interrupts: “You reveal your story as a tactic for getting the research participants to tell more. Right?”, to which Valerie responds: “The researcher’s story is important in its own right, not as a tactic. The stories play off each other. You learn more by interacting with each other where all participants have time to add to or change their stories than in a one-shot deal where the interviewer simply gets the first and in many cases, the most superficial, story. . . . I think their stories are being affected by the one I tell as well”.<sup>xxxv</sup> During the ensuing discussion Jack asks the obvious question: “But isn’t that introducing bias?” I will later take up the issues of bias, subjectivity and objectivity.

My initial intention was to explore which factors played a role in Ciftci’s decision to go to Syria, and if “pull and push factors”<sup>xxxvi</sup> were mentioned, to see which of them played the decisive role. Since I myself tend to believe that “pull factors” play the key role, I had planned to do this by conducting a detached, cool-headed and unbiased interview, where the most important thing would be to avoid leading questions. In this sense, my research would be a theory-testing one. However, it ended up veering into autoethnographic research. It was a discussion with a colleague that occasioned the second turn in my research. The moment I mentioned that I had become emotional during the interview with Ciftci, she said, “Many years ago you told a Danish political-cultural weekly that you were an extremist when you were young. Why don’t you incorporate your experiences and emotions when you analyze the interview with him?” This came as a disturbing surprise. I said, “Should I really once again speak about my problematic past and remember it again? You must understand this is psychologically burdening for me.” She had already done some phenomenological and autoethnographic work.<sup>xxxvii</sup> She reassured me and recommended a number of texts on autoethnography. As Carolyn Ellis<sup>xxxviii</sup> warns, it may not always be appropriate to add the researcher’s experience to the interviewee’s account but I could feel that telling Ciftci about my

extremist past rendered me more trustworthy and more sincere in his eyes and most possibly deepened his story and made it more authentic.

Thus, my interviews with Ciftci developed into “reflexive dyadic” and “interactive interviews”.<sup>xxxix</sup> They evolved into the “reflexive dyadic” form, as I spontaneously tried to tune into “the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics within the interview itself”.<sup>xl</sup> Being conscious of my own thoughts and feelings helped me to understand Ciftci’ situation and his explanations of his fascination with Islamic State. Instead of keeping quiet about my past and my self-disclosure in my account of our interaction, I decided to incorporate my subjective and emotional reflections to add “context and layers to the story being told by the participant”.<sup>xli</sup> My interviews developed also into “interactive interviews”.<sup>xlii</sup> This strategy was particularly useful, since we both had personal experiences of being drawn to extremist ideologies, albeit of different kinds. As Ellis notes, interviews on such topics require reciprocity and building of trust. Ellis describes this mutual process:

“[O]ne person’s disclosures and self-probing invite another’s disclosures and self-probing; where an increasingly intimate and trusting context makes it possible to reveal more of ourselves and probe deeper into another’s feelings and thoughts; where listening to and asking questions about another’s plight leads to greater understanding of one’s own; and where the examination and comparison of experience offers new insight into both lives”.<sup>xliii</sup>

Other scholars of terrorism have also shown interest in self-disclosure. Their considerations are not identical to mine but are similar to the autoethnographic tradition. They state that useful communication techniques in interviewing terrorists effectively include among others “a recognition of similarity (we are alike in some ways)”<sup>xliv</sup>, even self-disclosure.<sup>xlv</sup> Dolnik observes that not only does the interviewer’s attentive style encourage a greater sharing of information, it can

also have a positive rapport-building effect, especially with people who see themselves as self-defending victims who frame their involvement in terrorism as the only way to be heard.<sup>xlvi</sup> He argues that militants rarely dispute the observation that their actions are extreme, but that they see them as justified. According to him, this acknowledged extremity of terrorism is one of the possible reasons why militants tend to passionately explain and rationalize their actions, especially when speaking to a researcher whom they perceive as someone who is judging them and who does not understand the true drivers and root causes of their actions. This is where the interviewer's attentive style and engagement with their grievances and validation of some of their frustrations is expected to help contradict many of the terrorists' demonizing perceptions of Westerners or "Westernized Muslims". One can thus make it harder for them to label the researcher as unreasonable and even hostile, creating chances to build rapport and increase trust.<sup>xlvii</sup> Dolnik underlines that an essential part of active listening and engaging is to maintain the approach that one is not talking with a terrorist whose ideas and actions one condemns, but rather with "a rational human being who, for some set of reasons, has chosen - or felt forced into - an extreme, violent course of action".<sup>xlviii</sup> In my particular context, if I, a former extremist, cannot identify with some of Ciftci's motives, who then could? I had come to him not to judge him or to change his ideas, but precisely to probe into and understand his specific "set of reasons". On the other hand, I absolutely did not perceive it as my duty to be "giving voice to the voiceless".<sup>xlix</sup> As Zahar puts it, this would be succumbing to two other biases. Either accepting the "counter hegemonic" discourse of the terrorists at face value - notwithstanding one disagrees or even condemns their discourses and actions or projecting upon them our own interpretation of the situation and "romanticizing their reality".<sup>1</sup>

In a similar vein, White believes 'going-native' is a serious issue with regard to interviewing terrorists. Even if the researcher does not make this mistake "s/he may still be subject to the charge,

and this may threaten the credibility of the research” and scholars must therefore present rigorous documentation on who was interviewed, and why, and how.<sup>li</sup>

## **Objectivity and Detachment**

My self-disclosure and engagement with Ciftci and his opening up were all fine. However, an apprehensiveness was hanging in the air: Was this becoming emotional and the following self-disclosure a problem for my research? Was I at the mercy of my emotions? Was I risking presenting “miniature bubbles of navel gazing”?<sup>lii</sup> Was I being self-centered and betraying scientific principles? While conducting field work or interviewing a person, it is often recommended that one should not involve one’s own feelings in the research process. Behar observes that what bothers the critics of autoethnography is the insertion of personal stories into what we have been taught to think of as the analysis of impersonal social facts.<sup>liii</sup> In social sciences and literary criticism, the “reigning paradigms have traditionally called for distance, objectivity and abstraction” and “(t)he worst sin was to be ‘too personal’”.<sup>liv</sup> For example, Peter Berger warned against subjectivism in social sciences: “(T)he sociologist tries to be objective, to control his personal preferences, and prejudices, to perceive clearly rather than normatively”.<sup>lv</sup> As Kari Lerum notes, emotional detachment is implicit in the standard scientific method, since it is regarded as the key to objectivity, and since emotions are often associated with irrationality and loss of control.<sup>lvi</sup> However, objectivity and emotional rapport do not necessarily exclude each other. She highlights that the pursuit of objectivity per se is not the biggest roadblock to producing true critical knowledge. The biggest roadblock, she observes, is rather the demand of emotional detachment.<sup>lvii</sup> In a similar vein, Pamela Nilan states that there are two contrasting research paradigms: The first is the discourse of control, objectivity, even emotional detachment, and the second is the discourse of immersion, reflexivity and rapport.<sup>lviii</sup> She adds that the latter always yields rich and interesting

data, which the first sometimes does not. Calls for being objective and avoiding subjectivity are valid if they mean one should establish a critical distance from one's ideological biases and the theoretical framework(s) one uses in one's research.<sup>lix</sup> Lerum underlines that explicit and self-reflexive subjectivity can actually strengthen rather than invalidate an objective stance. On the other hand, emotional detachment, distance and adherence to one particular methodology stymie researchers seeking an adequate understanding of the phenomenon under study.<sup>lx</sup>

Kulick and Wilson<sup>lxi</sup> discusses the importance of self-exposure, both to the person(s) under study and to the reader and calls for a “self-reflexive anthropology”. Though the transformative experiences the authors have in mind are sexual relations with people under study, this could also be true for other emotion-laden spheres and situations such as mine. In Kulick and Wilson's view, the main reason anthropologists are reticent about their sexual involvement with the people they study has to do with the way anthropology was constituted as a science dedicated to the “objective recording and analysis of the habits and customs of other people”.<sup>lxii</sup> They quote Dwyer<sup>lxiii</sup> for writing that within this framework observation was considered to be “an objective act that in no way influenced the object's true significance, a significance that existed prior to the act of observing it”. According to Kulick and Wilson the biography and the position of the researcher therefore did not matter and “(t)extually, the ethnographers achieved this pose of not mattering by making themselves invisible”.<sup>lxiv</sup> They add that another reason for the absence of deeply private and personal experiences of anthropologists is the concomitant disciplinary disdain for personal narratives which “are often deemed self-indulgent, trivial, or heretical”.<sup>lxv</sup> It was precisely the possibility of ending up an “invisible” ventriloquist were I to refrain from self-disclosing to the scholarly audience (my second disclosure) due to fear of being deemed ‘self-indulgent’ which seemed untruthful and concerned me.

## **Conclusions**

In research on Islamist terrorism there is a need to employ different methods and means to understand the motivations of the people attracted to violent religious extremism. There should be breadth and flexibility in our methods so that it is possible “to respect the primacy of the object”.<sup>lxvi</sup> Bech describes it also as “sticking to the phenomena”.<sup>lxvii</sup> It is true that the methods researchers use cannot avoid being co-constitutive of their object, but as Bech cautions, this should not lead us to the radical conclusion that there is nothing left of the object outside of the method.<sup>lxviii</sup> Researchers should manage “the tension between objectivity and subjectivity in order to produce better portraits of the human condition”.<sup>lxix</sup> If I had followed the rules of objectivist methods I would have ended up cutting away dimensions of Ciftci’s reality and reducing his response options. Conducting an interview with him along with my self-disclosure turned out to suit well the unique characteristics of the person and the phenomenon I was studying.

I consider the process I went through during my interactions with Ciftci as “moving from objectification to an emotionally engaged ‘objective’ stance”.<sup>lxx</sup> At the beginning, I did not view my own experiences in extremist groups in my youth as “interesting, or even legitimate, to look at in its own right” as Ellis puts it.<sup>lxxi</sup> I was apparently under the spell of “the commitment of sociology to scientific method and objectivity” and the assumption that “you would keep who you were – your subjectivity and values – from biasing your observations”.<sup>lxxii</sup> I did not even consider them as relevant to my research; I was not a “former extremist”, I was a “Researcher”. Any phenomenologically oriented researcher working in the field would be able to get almost the same information from the interviewee and present a fine analysis of his motivations.

However, as my interactions increased and deepened with my participant, I began to acknowledge that “without being rooted in highly subjective and emotionally engaged experiences, objective knowledge has no hope of being critical”.<sup>lxxiii</sup> I realized that “the best objective knowledge is rooted in subjective experiences, publicly acknowledged and reflected on by authors .

. .”<sup>lxxiv</sup> However, as Lerum warns, they have to be then augmented by, contrasted with, and verified against a number of analytic levels and validity checks.

In his discussion on the interrelated issues such as objectivity, subjectivity and value-free research, Bech<sup>lxxv</sup> points out two criteria for a critical academic narrative: it should be not only adequate, but also fruitful for bettering the circumstances in hand. Adequacy means that one’s narrative should comport as best as possible with, correspond to and be consistent with social reality. It should be scientifically qualified, not ideological, subjective and arbitrary. A critical researcher should not launch into uncontrolled subjectivity, but must strive towards an ideal of objectivity, impartiality, unbiasedness and factuality. Otherwise, says Bech, one can let oneself be employed in inter alia the advertising industry.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

Bech’s second criterium for critical scholarship, fruitfulness, directs researchers’ attention to the obligation that one is in principle obliged to call attention to the possibilities for the better. When we study a certain phenomenon, we have to keep in mind how it could be bettered. This doesn’t mean that research becomes ideological, subjectivist and arbitrary. Bech remarks that a social scientist who is not always pursuing some value-laden errand does not exist.<sup>lxxvii</sup> The difference between a researcher who advocates conducting value-free research and a critical researcher is that the former doesn’t reflect on her implicit values and thus produces ideology under the guise of science. The critical researcher, on the other hand, is conscious of this circumstance and, thus, is capable of reflecting critically also on her values.

A couple of warnings are warranted concerning autoethnography and self-disclosure. Ellis cautions that autoethnography can be “overly self-indulgent; it can be self-adoring or self-hating without being sufficiently self-aware or self-critical”.<sup>lxxviii</sup> Moreover, Behar emphasizes that writing vulnerable texts can be as dull as writing invulnerably and distantly. What is worse, “a boring self-

revelation, one that fails to move the reader, is more than embarrassing; it is humiliating”.<sup>lxxxix</sup>. Self-revelation should not be a “decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake”, but should be able to draw connections between one’s personal experience and the subject under study. Achieving this requires “a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied”.<sup>lxxx</sup>

A final point: autoethnographic research can contribute to the humanization of terrorists. Cottee and Hayward<sup>lxxxix</sup> note that the central project of terrorism studies at the moment of its inception as a discipline in the 1960s was to normalize the terrorist agent. Now, over half a century later, “the more urgent task is to *humanize* him . . . . Terrorists, however morally despicable their actions, are inescapably *human* agents, with all-too-*human* dreams and passions and desires. Addressing these is, or ought to be, one of the central tasks of terrorism studies”.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

This article is hopefully a modest contribution to this important endeavor.



---

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Enes Ciftci. 2017. "Letter to the Danish People". Handwritten document given to me in the visiting cell. Excerpts from the letter were published beforehand on TV2's homepage.

<sup>ii</sup> Orsini and Dawson elaborate on the methodological difficulties and moral dilemmas concerning conducting interviews with respectively Italian left-wing and Islamist terrorists. Alessandro Orsini, "One Day Among the Diehard Terrorists. The Psychological Costs of Doing Ethnographic Research," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36, no. 4 (March 2013a); Alessandro Orsini, "Interview with a Terrorist by Vocation: A Day Among the Diehard Terrorists, Part II," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36, no. 8 (July 2013b); Lorne L. Dawson, "Taking Terrorist Accounts of their Motivations Seriously: An Exploration of the Hermeneutics of Suspicion." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 5 (October 2019); Lorne L. Dawson and Amarnath Amarasingam, "Talking to Foreign Fighters: Insights into the Motivations for Hijrah to Syria and Iraq", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 3 (December 2016).

<sup>iii</sup> See for example: Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Prisons de France : violence, radicalisation, déshumanisation : surveillants et détenus parlent*, (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2016); Farhad Khosrokhavar. 2009. *Inside jihadism: Understanding Jihadi Movements Worldwide* (London: Routledge, 2009); Jerrold Post, Ehud Sprinzak, and Laurita Denny, "The Terrorists in Their Own Words: Interviews with 35 Incarcerated Middle Eastern Terrorists" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15, no. 1 (January 2003)

<sup>iv</sup> Nilsson (2010: 10) discusses two contrasting views on the reliability of data obtained from prison interviews. He cites Bloom for suggesting that imprisoned terrorists develop their vocabulary to better articulate their ideas. On the other side, Horgan argues that much of what is said by such individual terrorists about ideology is post hoc invention. Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: The Many Faces of Women Terrorists* (Toronto: Penguin, 2010), 51; John Horgan, "Interviewing Terrorists: Reflections on Fieldwork and Implications for Psychological Research" *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 4, no. 3 (March 2012), 200.

<sup>v</sup> Orsini's (2013a) security concerns and especially emotional tension about interviewing a terrorist were different from mine. In a nutshell, regarding the second, Orsini's fear seems to stem from the fact that he begins to come in contact with something (terrorism) he has never identified with before. My fear, on the other hand, was that I had already identified with these emotions in my youth and now I had to compartmentalize and put together emotions and theoretical knowledge in my endeavor to understand Cifti's specific motivations.

<sup>vi</sup> Jeff Ferrell and Mark S. Hamm, eds. *Ethnography at the edge: Crime, Deviance, and Field Research*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press. 1998).

<sup>vii</sup> I cannot judge how real this permission issue was. I wondered how on earth he would contact Raqqa. However, I thought it unwise to ask. I was afraid of making him suspicious. I think this was a part of his "impression management" (Goffman 1990, 203), he was probably trying to convince me and himself that he is an important person. Goffman Erving, *The presentation of self in everyday life Erving Goffman* (London, Penguin Books, 1990).

---

viii I got permission to record my interviews with Ciftci the third time I visited him. When I was able to record him, I asked him to repeat what he said before.

ix Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I. A methodological novel about autoethnography* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2004), 118; see also Luigi Gariglio, "Doing (prison) Research Differently: Reflections on Autoethnography and 'Emotional Recall'. *Oñati Socio-legal Series*, 8 no. 2 (May 2018). <http://ssrn.com/abstract=3100850>Gariglio, 2018).

x Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 118.

xi Orsini, "Terrorist by Vocation", 674, 678. Antonio, the leftwing terrorist Orsini interviewed repeatedly used the word "sacrifice" to describe his choice of life. Just like Ciftci, Antonio had also abandoned his family and loved ones without giving any explanation.

xii Helen Rose Fuchs Ebaugh, *Becoming an ex: The process of role exit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1.

xiii *Ibid.*, xv.

xiv Olivier Roy, *Jihad and death. The global appeal of Islamic State* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017); Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, *Engineers of Jihad. the curious connection between violent extremism and education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Simon Cottee and Keith Hayward, "Terrorist (E)motives. The existential attractions of terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 2, (November 2011); Kevin McDonald, *Radicalization* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

xv Ciftci, 2017, "Letter to the Danish People". Enes Ciftci. 2017. "Brev til TV2" (Letter to TV2). February 19, 2017.

<http://nyheder.tv2.dk/krimi/2017-02-19-dansk-syrienkriger-taler-ud-det-er-jer-selv-den-er-gal-med>; Lomholt, Anders. "Dansk syrienkriger taler ud: 'Det er jer selv, den er gal med'" ("You are the ones who have gotten the wrong end of the stick". An Islamic State Warrior speaks out). <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/krimi/2017-02-19-dansk-syrienkriger-taler-ud-det-er-jer-selv-den-er-gal-med>; See also Mehmet Ümit Necef, "'It is you who has gotten the wrong end of the stick'. An Islamic State Warrior speaks out to Danes." March 20, 2017. Resource Centre, Centre for Middle East Studies, University of Southern Denmark; Mehmet Ümit Necef, 2017b. "Categorizing Islamic State Supporters in Denmark: The cases of Enes Ciftci and Natascha Colding-Olsen." June 2017. Resource Centre, Centre for Middle East Studies, University of Southern Denmark.

xvi Beutel and Perez (2016) draw a parallel between Islamic State's and the British White Feather Movement's shaming men to enlist in the fight against the enemy. During World War I, the "White Feather Brigade" "distributed white feathers to men in civilian clothing as a means of making their non-service more noticeable among the public". Alejandro Beutel and Krystina Perez, "From WWI to ISIS, Using Shame and Masculinity in Recruitment Narratives." START (June 2016). <https://www.start.umd.edu/news/wwi-isis-using-shame-and-masculinity-recruitment-narratives>.

xvii Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 67.

xviii Andrew Abbott, "Against narrative: A Preface to Lyrical Sociology," *Sociological Theory* 25, no 1 (March 2007): 67.

xix Robert W. White, "Issues in the Study of Political Violence: Understanding the Motives of Participants in Small Group Political Violence" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 12, no. 1 (January 2000), 100.

xx Henning Bech, "Livsverdensmetode – erfaringer og råd fra fænomenologisk forskning" [Life-World method. Experiences and recommendations from phenomenological research], in *Fænomenologi. Teorier og metoder* [Theories and methods], ed. Bjørn Schiermer (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzel, 2013), 113.

xxi Otto F. Bollnow, "The nature of *Stimmungen*," *Philosophia* 45, no. 4 (December 2017): 1399.

xxii Bech, "Livsverdensmetode", 114.

xxiii Martin Heidegger, *Being and time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 173.

xxiv Bollnow, *Stimmungen*, 1412-1413.

xxv *Ibid.*, 1412.

xxvi *Ibid.*, 1404.

xxvii "Hocam" literally means "my teacher". But in Turkish you can use the word to create closeness to any person.

xxviii Marco Nilsson, "Interviewing jihadists: On the importance of drinking tea and other methodological considerations", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 41, no. 6 (April 2017).

xxix Orsini, "One Day", 345.

xxx Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: The Free Press, 1950), 307.

xxxi *Ibid.*

xxxii P. C. Cozby, "Self-disclosure: A literature review". *Psychological Bulletin*, 79 no. 2 (February 1973): 88.

xxxiii Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, eds., *Handbook of Autoethnography* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press Inc., 2015).

- 
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Ebaugh, *Becoming an ex*, xiii.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 65.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Lorne L. Dawson and Amarnath Amarasingam, "Talking to Foreign Fighters: Insights into the Motivations for Hijrah to Syria and Iraq", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 3 (December 2016). Jakob Sheikh, "I Just Said It. The State": Examining the Motivations for Danish Foreign Fighting in Syria," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (January 2016).
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Henriette Frees Esholdt, "Virgins, terrorists, and ten children: Immigrants' humorous play with ethnic stereotypes in bonding with Danes in the workplace," *Symbolic Interaction* 42, no. 4 (April 2019); Henriette Frees Esholdt, Når humor, leg og lyst er på spil: Social interaktion på en multietnisk arbejdsplads (When humour, play and pleasure are on the line. Social interaction in a multi-ethnic workplace) (Lund: University of Lund, 2015).
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 61.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-69.
- <sup>xl</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-2.
- <sup>xli</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.
- <sup>xlii</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.
- <sup>xliii</sup> Carolyn Ellis, C. Kiesinger, and L. Tillmann-Healy, "Interactive interviewing: Talking about emotional experience," in *Reflexivity and voice* ed. Rosanne Hertz (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), 119-49 as cited in Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 66.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Arthur A. Slatkin, *Communications in crisis and hostage negotiations* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas Publishers, 205), 19.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Adam Dolnik, "Up close and personal" in *Conducting terrorism field research: a guide* ed. Adam Dolnik (London: Routledge, 2013), 243; Adam Dolnik, "Conducting field research on terrorism," in *Terrorism and political violence* ed. Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, Gordon Clubb, and Simon Mabon (London: Sage, 2015), 292.
- <sup>xlv</sup> Dolnik, "Conducting", 292.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 292-293.
- <sup>xlviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.
- <sup>lix</sup> Marie-Joelle Zahar, "Fieldwork, objectivity, and the academic enterprise," in *Surviving field research: Working in violent and difficult situations* ed. Chandra Lekha Sriram, John C. King, Julie A. Mertus, Olga Martin-Ortega, and Johanna Herman (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 204.
- <sup>l</sup> Zahar, "Fieldwork, objectivity", 204.
- <sup>li</sup> White, "Issues" 103.
- <sup>lii</sup> Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), 14.
- <sup>liii</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>liv</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-3.
- <sup>lv</sup> Peter Berger, "Sociology as a Passion to Understand" in *The meaning of sociology: A reader* ed. Joel M. Charon and Lee Garth Vigilant (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 1993), 5.
- <sup>lvi</sup> Kari Lerum, 2001: "Subjects of desire: Academic armor, intimate ethnography, and the production of critical knowledge," *Qualitative Inquiry* 7 no. 4 (August 2001): 467.
- <sup>lvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 466.
- <sup>lviii</sup> Pamela Nilan, "Dangerous fieldwork' re-examined: the question of researcher subject position," *Qualitative Research* 2 no. 3 (December 2002): 364.
- <sup>lix</sup> For a discussion on objectivity and subjectivity in social sciences see also Henning Bech, *Kvinder og mænd* (Women and men) (Copenhagen, Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2005), 26-27.
- <sup>lx</sup> Lerum, "Subjects of desire", 468.
- <sup>lxi</sup> Don Kulick and Margaret Wilson, eds., *Taboo: Sex, identity and erotic subjectivity in anthropological fieldwork* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1.
- <sup>lxii</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>lxiii</sup> Kevin Dwyer, *Moroccan dialogues: Anthropology in question* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1982), 257 cited in Kulick and Wilson, "Taboo", 3.
- <sup>lxiv</sup> Kulick and Wilson, "Taboo", 3.
- <sup>lxv</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, "Fieldwork in Common Places," in *Writing cultures: The poetics and politics of ethnography* James Clifford and George E. Marcus ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 31 as cited in Kulick and Wilson, "Taboo", 3.
- <sup>lxvi</sup> Henning Bech, *When Men Meet. Homosexuality and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997), 5. Bech is here inspired by *Adorno Negative Dialectics* (New York, Routledge, 1966), 183ff.; See also Henning Bech, *Leisure Pursuits: Studies in Modernity, Masculinity, Homosexuality and Late Modernity: A Survey of some Results*. Sociologisk rapportserie, nr. 1999:3, (Copenhagen: Department of Sociology, 1999), 26.

---

lxvii Bech, *When Men Meet*, 5.

lxviii *Ibid.*, 5.

lxix Raymond Madden, *Being ethnographic. A guide to the theory and practice of ethnography* (London: Sage, 2017), 2.

lxx Lerum, "Subjects of desire", 476.

lxxi Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 15.

lxxii *Ibid.*

lxxiii Lerum, "Subjects of desire", 480.

lxxiv *Ibid.*

lxxv Henning Bech, "Dikotomi, hierarki etc.: om den store fortælling om køn, seksualitet, etnicitet osv., samt om nogle mulige mellemstore alternativer," [Dichotomy, hierarchy etc.: on the grand narrative about gender, sexuality, ethnicity etc. as well as some medium-sized alternatives] in *Kultur på kryds og tværs* [Culture from top to bottom] ed. Henning Bech and Anne Scott Sørensen (Århus: Klim, 2005), 195; see also Bech, *Kvinder og mænd*, 26-28.

lxxvi *Ibid.*, 195.

lxxvii *Ibid.*, 196-7.

lxxviii Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 34.

lxxix Behar, *The Vulnerable*, 13.

lxxx *Ibid.*

lxxxi Cottee and Hayward, "Terrorist (E)motives", 980.

lxxxii *Ibid.*

---

## References

Abbott, Andrew. "Against narrative: A Preface to Lyrical Sociology." *Sociological Theory* 25, no. 1 (March 2007): 66-99.

Bech, Henning, *When Men Meet. Homosexuality and Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity, 1997.

Bech, Henning. *Leisure Pursuits: Studies in Modernity, Masculinity, Homosexuality and Late Modernity*. Copenhagen: Department of Sociology, 1999.

Bech, Henning. "Dikotomi, hierarki etc.: om den store fortælling om køn, seksualitet, etnicitet osv., samt om nogle mulige mellemstore alternativer." [Dichotomy, hierarchy etc.: on the grand narrative about gender, sexuality, ethnicity etc. as well as some medium-sized alternatives] In *Kultur på kryds og tværs* [Culture from top to bottom], edited by Henning Bech and Ann Scott Sørensen, 191-226. Århus: Klim, 2005.

Bech, Henning, *Kvinder og mænd* (Women and men). Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2005.

Bech, Henning. "Livsverdensmetode – erfaringer og råd fra fænomenologisk forskning." [Life-World method. Experiences and recommendations from phenomenological research] In *Fænomenologi: Teorier og metoder* [Phenomenology: Theories and methods] edited by Bjørn Schiermer, 95-123. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzel, 2013.

Behar, Ruth. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2014.

---

Berger, Peter. "Sociology as a Passion to Understand". In *The meaning of sociology. A reader*, edited by Joel M. Charon. Upper Saddle River: Pearson. Prentice Hall, 1993, 2-8.

Bollnow, Otto F. "The nature of *Stimmungen*." *Philosophia* 45 no. 4 (December 2017): 1399-1418.

Ciftci, Enes. "Brev til det danske folk" (Letter to the Danish People). Handwritten document given to me by Ciftci in 2018. Excerpts from the letter were published on TV2's homepage with title "Letter to TV2" in 2017.

Ciftci, Enes. "Brev til TV2." (Letter to TV2). February 19, 2017. <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/krimi/2017-02-19-dansk-syrienkriger-taler-ud-det-er-jer-selv-den-er-gal-med>.

Cook, David B. "Contemporary martyrdom: Ideology and material culture." In: *Jihadi culture*, edited by Thomas Hegghammer, 151-170. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Cottee, Simon and Keith Hayward, "Terrorist (E)motives. The existential attractions of terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 12, (November 2011): 963-986.

Cozby, Paul C., "Self-disclosure: A literature review," *Psychological Bulletin* 79, no. 2 (February 1973): 73-91.

Dawson, Lorne L. and Amarnath Amarasingam, "Talking to Foreign Fighters: Insights into the Motivations for Hijrah to Syria and Iraq," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 3 (December 2016): 191-210.

Dawson, Lorne L., "Taking Terrorist Accounts of their Motivations Seriously: An Exploration of the Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 5 (October 2019): 74-89.

Dolnik, Adam. "Up close and personal." In: *Conducting terrorism field research: a guide*, edited by Adam Dolnik, 224-250. New York: Routledge, 2013.

- 
- Dolnik, Adam. "Conducting field research on terrorism." In *Terrorism and political violence*, edited by Caroline Kennedy-Pipe and Gordon Clubb, and Simon Mabon, 280-295. London: Sage, 2015
- Dwyer, Kevin. *Moroccan dialogues: Anthropology in question*. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1982.
- Ebaugh, Helen Rose Fuchs. *Becoming an ex: The process of role exit*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Ellis, Carolyn and C. Kiesinger and L. Tillmann-Healy, "Interactive interviewing: Talking about emotional experience." In *Reflexivity and voice* edited by Rosanna Hertz, 119-149. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997.
- Ellis, Carolyn. *The Ethnographic I. A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2004.
- Esholdt, Henriette. Frees. "Virgins, terrorists, and ten children: Immigrants' humorous play with ethnic stereotypes in bonding with Danes in the workplace". *Symbolic Interaction* 42, no. 4 (April 2019): 691–716.
- Esholdt, Henriette F. 2015. "Når humor, leg og lyst er på spil: Social interaktion på en multietnisk arbejdsplads (When Humor, Play and Pleasure Are on the Line: Social Interaction in a Multiethnic Workplace)." Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, Lund University.
- Jeff Ferrell and Mark S. Hamm, eds. 1998. *Ethnography at the Edge: Crime, Deviance, and Field Research*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988.
- Gambetta, Diego, and Steffen Hertog, *Engineers of Jihad. the curious connection between violent extremism and education*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

---

Gariglio, Luigi. "Doing (prison) Research Differently: Reflections on Autoethnography and 'Emotional Recall'." *Oñati Socio-legal Series* 8, no. 2 (May 2018), 205-224.

<http://ssrn.com/abstract=3100850>

Goffman, Erving, *The presentation of self in everyday life* (London, Penguin Books, 1990).

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and time*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.

Jones, Stacy Holmen and Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis eds. *Handbook of autoethnography*.

Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press Inc., 2015.

Khosrokhavar, Farhad. *Inside jihadism*. London: Routledge, 2009.

Kulick, D. and Margaret Wilson eds. *Taboo: Sex, identity and erotic subjectivity in anthropological fieldwork*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Lerum, Kari. "Subjects of desire: Academic armor, intimate ethnography, and the production of critical knowledge." *Qualitative Inquiry* 7, no. 4 (August 2001): 466-483.

Lomholt, Anders, "Dansk syrienkriger taler ud: 'Det er jer selv, den er gal med'." ("You are the ones who have gotten the wrong end of the stick". An Islamic State Warrior speaks out to Danes) TV2 Homepage, February 19, 2017. <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/krimi/2017-02-19-dansk-syrienkriger-taler-ud-det-er-jer-selv-den-er-gal-med>

Madden, Raymond. *Being ethnographic. A guide to the theory and practice of ethnography*.

London: Sage, 2017.

McDonald, Kevin. *Radicalization*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018.

Necef, Mehmet Ümit. "'It is you who has gotten the wrong end of the stick,' An Islamic State Warrior speaks out to Danes." March 2017. Resource Centre, Centre for Middle East Studies, University of Southern Denmark, <https://www.sdu.dk/->

[/media/files/om\\_sdu/centre/c\\_mellemoest/videncenter/artikler/2017/necef+article+march+17.pdf](https://www.sdu.dk/-/media/files/om_sdu/centre/c_mellemoest/videncenter/artikler/2017/necef+article+march+17.pdf)



---

Necef, Mehmet Ümit. "Categorizing Islamic State Supporters in Denmark: The cases of Enes Ciftci and Natascha Colding-Olsen," June 2017, Resource Centre, Centre for Middle East Studies, University of Southern Denmark. [https://www.sdu.dk/-/media/files/om\\_sdu/centre/c\\_mellemoest/videncenter/artikler/2017/necef+article+june+2017.pdf](https://www.sdu.dk/-/media/files/om_sdu/centre/c_mellemoest/videncenter/artikler/2017/necef+article+june+2017.pdf)

Nilan, Pamela. "'Dangerous fieldwork' re-examined: the question of researcher subject position." *Qualitative Research* 2 no. 3 (December 2002): 363-386.

Nilsson, Marco. "Interviewing jihadists: On the importance of drinking tea and other methodological considerations." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 41 no.6 (April 2017): 419-432.

Orsini, Alessandro, "A Day Among the Diehard Terrorists. The Psychological Costs of Doing Ethnographic Research," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36, no. 4 (March 2013a): 337-351.

Orsini, Alessandro, "Interview with a Terrorist by Vocation: A Day Among the Diehard Terrorists, Part II," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36, no. 8 (July 2013b): 672-684.

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Fieldwork in Common Places." In *Writing cultures: The poetics and politics of ethnography* edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 27-50. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Roy, Olivier. *Jihad and death. The global appeal of Islamic State*. London: Hurst & Company, 2017.

Ruth, Behar. *The vulnerable observer*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

Sheikh, Jakob, "I Just Said It. The State": Examining the Motivations for Danish Foreign Fighting in Syria," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 6 (January 2016): 59-67.

Simmel, Georg. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: The Free Press, 1950.

Slatkin, Arthur A. *Communications in crisis and hostage negotiations*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas Publishers, 2005.

---

Zahar, Marie-Joelle. "Fieldwork, objectivity, and the academic enterprise." In *Surviving field research: Working in violent and difficult situations*, edited by Chandra Lekha Sriram and John C. King, Julie A. Mertus, and Olga Martin-Ortega, 191-212. London: Routledge, 2009.