

Online appendix: A further note on positionality and fieldwork experience

To better contextualize my fieldwork experience, I find it crucial to share my background information: although I am a primary financial provider for my parents and some other relatives, I also benefit from the fact that I am a male researcher researching my own country with no spousal and parental obligations. Furthermore, I am among the lucky few who is able to secure employment and conduct additional fieldwork post-PhD.

In terms of my scholarly commitment to civic engagement, as a former student activist in Indonesia, I remain committed to maintain a continuing engagement with social movement landscape in the country via my research work. Moreover, I was lucky enough to conduct my research during the relatively democratic period of the county, when my local interlocutors can speak up their mind relatively freely. This is a more favorable situation compared to scholars working in the more authoritarian areas of Southeast Asia, for instance (Morgenbesser and Weiss 2018).ⁱ This also means juggling between two personas: as a scholar who maintains some critical distance from my research topic and an engaged “fellow traveler” in Indonesia’s social movement landscape.

Each of my fieldwork mode (policy research, dissertation research, and activist work) between 2015–2017 had a different focus: I wrote my dissertation on the politics of elite-peasant relations in post-authoritarian Indonesia, served as an ethnographer in T4D’s collaborative research on the impact of transparency intervention on rural healthcare service, and held public lectures and popular education sessions for university students, local researchers, and civil society activists on topics such as social movements, critical social analysis, and agrarian studies, among others.

My initial plan was to stay in Indonesia for 1–1.5 years. But as it is often the case with fieldwork, I found out that I had to extend my stay to gather enough data and therefore I ended up staying for two years in Indonesia.

While I have the advantage of being an insider researcher as a citizen of the country that I am studying, my experience seems to resonate with some other doctoral candidates and newly-minted PhDs who had side jobs to support their fieldwork – typically in the development and policy sectors. As anecdotal as it may sound, these examples might be somewhat common.

Throughout my fieldwork, I juggled between my own research, other commissioned projects to support my livelihood, and works with local research and activist scenes. Fortunately, it turned out that I was able to cross-fertilize these different commitments – if not fully, at least partially. Of course, there were moments where I had to go the extra mile for each activity. For instance, I sometimes had to conduct additional interviews for T4D’s rural healthcare project, chatted until wee hours with my interlocutors for my dissertation research, or spent some extra days to co-organize a public discussion or a popular education session for activist communities. Nevertheless, I found this extra effort to be quite bearable and most of the time I was able to combine different fieldwork activities into one time frame – whether it is within a couple of days, a week, or several months.

I also survived financially by receiving occasional honorariums for invited speaking engagements and commissioned writings from a few research institutes and universities. These additional financial lifelines greatly helped in moments of financial precariousness. The vast majority of my talks, however, were invited on pro bono basis and as a rule of thumb I never asked for payment for my talks at Indonesian institutions – though I accepted the honorarium if there was any. I also never received payment for talks for activist audiences (e.g. university students or local social movement activists).

After my PhD, I was able to get an Indonesia-based policy-oriented research fellowship job with the Australian National University’s New Mandala Indonesia Correspondent Fellowship to cover the 2019 Indonesian elections from late 2018 to mid-2019

before transitioning into my current position as a postdoctoral fellow at Kyoto University's Center for Southeast Asian Studies. This allowed me to gather additional fieldwork data after PhD. In the context of today's job market and increasing occupational duties for PhD candidates and early-career scholars, this is a luxury.

With regard to integrating interview data from fieldwork, "weighing" interview data sometimes became inevitable. While most if not all of my interlocutors understand this, at times I was afraid that by focusing on making sound causal claims – an important task, in my view – I might not be able to capture and appreciate the richness of my interlocutors' narratives and lives. Both are equally important, but there are moments when I had to prioritize one over the other.

ⁱ At least before the latest phase of illiberal turn in Indonesian democracy and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Notes

Morgenbesser, Lee, and Meredith L. Weiss. 2018. "Survive and Thrive: Field Research in Authoritarian Southeast Asia." *Asian Studies Review* 42 (3): 385-403.