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Encounters at Manuscript Preparation: Inquiry in Conflict's Aftermath

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Abstract

This exercise of the researcher self explores relationships materializing in manuscript preparation, suggests that conflict-site research is more of a social and affective experience, from proposal to manuscript preparation, than most researchers realize. Outside of clinical and ameliorative approaches, little educational research focuses on ongoing, unresolved conflict. Even less sheds light on the experience of the conflict-site researcher. Here, I show how texts of other conflict-site writers accompanied my process of manuscript preparation, just as activist teachers I observed during the field work phase stood among peers when protesting and facing police repression. Correspondingly, I discuss an intertextual approach of reaching out to others and drawing on published stories while composing the main narrative of my manuscript, *Movements on the streets and in schools*. I call this practice *conrading* based on my turning to Anna Tsing and W. G. Sebald who had turned to the stories of Joseph Conrad in their books. As I called upon other authors who wrote about conflict in my assembling a social movement-based manuscript, moving forward, I suggest the uptake of social and textual relationships will become important when researching in times and spaces of pandemic, state repression and institutional defunding.

Keywords

convivencia, Oaxaca, Mexico, narrative inquiry, educational social movements, exercises of the self, post-qualitative research, education and post-conflict, intertextuality, manuscript preparation, Anna L. Tsing, W. G. Sebald

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Encounters at Manuscript Preparation: Inquiry in Conflict's Aftermath

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This exercise of the researcher self explores relationships materializing in manuscript preparation, suggests that conflict-site research is more of a social and affective experience, from proposal to manuscript preparation, than most researchers realize. Outside of clinical and ameliorative approaches, little educational research focuses on ongoing, unresolved conflict. Even less sheds light on the experience of the conflict-site researcher. Here, I show how texts of other conflict-site writers accompanied my process of manuscript preparation, just as activist teachers I observed during the field work phase stood among peers when protesting and facing police repression. Correspondingly, I discuss an intertextual approach of reaching out to others and drawing on published stories while composing the main narrative of my manuscript, *Movements on the streets and in schools*. I call this practice *conradizing* based on my turning to Anna Tsing and W. G. Sebald who had turned to the stories of Joseph Conrad in their books. As I called upon other authors who wrote about conflict in my assembling a social movement-based manuscript, moving forward, I suggest the uptake of social and textual relationships will become important when researching in times and spaces of pandemic, state repression and institutional defunding.

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“[K]eep track of not just the problematic, but the catastrophic.”
-Cornell West, 2019, para. 7

Keeping Track of Catastrophes

Writing a book as a sole author struck me as a social and intertextual experience. Writing up findings on the intersections of classroom teaching and teacher activism between Oaxaca and Mexico Cities and defending my 2012 dissertation, I published in curriculum studies and qualitative research journals, but I felt conflict and its aftermath weigh heavier on me when preparing a book. *Movements on the Streets and in Schools: State Repression, Neoliberal Reforms, and Oaxaca Teacher Counter-Pedagogies* (Sadlier, 2019) came from my doctoral dissertation in Oaxaca and after my own experience as a survivor of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and former teacher of activist teachers in Mexico. The Mexican teachers' project might have concluded with the dissertation and initial articles; however, in a book I sought readers outside academia, including novice teachers who might draw inspiration from the educators' struggles and strategies. When printed, I sent a copy of the book to post qualitative researcher, Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, who suggested I write on what counts as “data” and “analysis” in

my inquiry. In response to St. Pierre, I offer this exercise (Foucault, 1990)—an individual’s incursion into self-care and understanding (p. xiv) without pre-set notions of moral rectitude (p. 28)—on the social and intertextual experience of turning conflict-zone research for a narrow academic group of scholars into a book for a public, tracing out the catastrophic. Specifically, I describe my debt to *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Tsing, 2015) and *The Rings of Saturn* (Sebald, 1999), two books that offered less in terms of theory, methodology or regional content knowledge than they did as companions in the process of manuscript preparation on this conflict zone research.¹

How can self-other linkages matter so much in social upheaval? And, how did surviving Hurricane Katrina and completing conflict-zone research lead to a manuscript where I depended so much on Tsing (2015) and Sebald (1999)? In June 2010, my participant observation (Spradley, 1980) research in teacher protests began with social connections, as I attended an alternative education² conference at the Sección 9³ office in Mexico City. I stood in the hallway with conference delegates and attendees entering and exiting, sensing my estrangement, until an official from Sección 9 of Mexico’s national teachers’ union⁴ summoned me, inquired about my affiliation and welcomed me with a postage stamp-sized green “guest” badge. In those days, I also reached out to professional teachers six hours away in Oaxaca, mostly students I had taught a decade earlier. At times, when I approached teachers with direct questions, I got vague, dismissive answers. However, when I accompanied them on site visits to rural schools, drinking Nescafé and eating eggs with chorizo at the roadside café beside the school, I got more information than I asked for.⁵ In her research in rural Mexico, Trinidad Galván (2015) has termed such relationship-building before and during data gathering *convivencia*, the struggle to be fully present among others in research (p. 12). In Oaxaca, sociologist Martínez Vásquez (2009) has discussed an “*espacio civil* (civic space)” (p. 343) – an unstructured solidarity network of organizations and individuals coming to life during conflict (pp. 344-345). This civic space is not borne in conflict but through everyday social interaction, even among adversaries.⁶ I first experienced *convivencia* and the civic space in 1998 when teaching Oaxacan teachers, who took days off from my classes to march, sit in and chant in the streets. They often badgered me for my North American privilege and grilled me on United States’ hegemony when I observed, dismissively, the city’s potholes filling up in the rainy season. When the teachers discovered that my birthday fell on a class day, they canceled class, placed a frosted cake on my desk, and I realized their critiques coincided with a restrained

¹ Intertextuality describes how a text comes to life, not only in material form or by alluding to other texts but also from the social and ideological world around (Bloome & Bailey, 1992, p. 183), where “readers and writers not only recall related texts and experiences” but they also expound on them (Beach, 1992, p. 96). I need not to have cited Tsing (2015) or Sebald (1999) for their intertextual influence to hold sway.

² Alternative education efforts in Oaxaca have endeavored to supplant official curricula with locally relevant ones (Hernández, 2009), approaches that become available for teachers through conference proceedings (CEDES 22, 2010) and workshop manuals (2018).

³ Data sources from this conference, like most protest events, multiplied: in newspaper announcements, my participant observation notes, TV and print media coverage, interviews with attendees and conceptual responses via proceedings or reports. A single march, roadblock, act of vandalism or conference could generate hundreds of pages of material.

⁴ Sección 9, Local 9 of the SNTE, the Mexican teachers’ union, forms part of the CNTE dissident caucus. Attending CNTE events, officials often asked me to show identification, as their events are often surveilled and infiltrated by agents of the state and the mainstream teachers’ union.

⁵ Notice how Hampton (Hampton & Carillo, 2013) avoided tape recording when crossing El Paso to Juárez. When an advisor who researches in South Asia asked how as an Anglophone male I accessed the world of rural Oaxacan women, I responded that sitting and listening to their stories became my mode of relation and then of representation.

⁶ When discussing social group conflict in Oaxaca, it is important to avoid determining adversaries/allies as an essentialized, hostile binary. I often observed dissident teachers collaborating with their declared enemies. Norget (2006) also observed adversaries setting enmity aside to honor the dead at Oaxacan funerals (p. 114).

form of love. As a doctoral student, 2006-2010, the teachers invited me down to carry out dissertation fieldwork in their school settings; thus, I researched in the company people I knew well, except when they would caution me against approaching the police using force against protesters, and I would slip away to go on my own. Equally, I found book manuscript preparation as a single author an artificial and alienating experience, so I turned to the work of Tsing (2015) and Sebald (1999) on conflict and its aftermath, to intertextually accompany me in my book as I had accompanied my former students in the field.

In Oaxaca, my socio-textual connection-making continued after the closure of fieldwork, May 2011, when I reached out to my UMass dissertation advisors and actively read on conflict. A political theorist on my committee referred me to Tsing (2005) on how local practice taps into globalized forces, while my critical literacies committee chair suggested I turn to St. Pierre (2011) on fieldnote write-ups. A year later, my committee sitting in a circle after my defense revealed that the dissertation read like a book, that I should take seriously the “zones of awkward engagement” (Tsing, 2005, p. xi)⁷ and produce a manuscript. Sending copies of the 2019 published book to St. Pierre and Tsing, in part out of gratitude and in part out of a desire to connect personally with the authors whose analysis I depended on,⁸ I become aware how social engagement came not only through direct interaction but through relationships with texts like *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Tsing, 2015) and *The Rings of Saturn* (Sebald, 1999). St. Pierre wrote back to me, urging me to describe how I prepared my manuscript.⁹ To be sure, in this exercise it may seem methodologically sketchy to credit an ethnography I cited very little (Tsing, 2015) and a novel (Sebald, 1999) I didn’t cite at all; however, these texts stitched social, political and historical elements of the conflictual and accompanied me in my 2016-2019 manuscript preparation, through my writing on the conflictual.¹⁰ Drawn out of Tsing and Sebald, and in response to St. Pierre, in (Sadlier, 2019) I used a socio-textual referencing practice I call *conrading*, a strategy of accompaniment in conflict and post conflict research writing, which I describe below.

Tsing’s Troubling Stories

The most compelling troubled story can sometimes materialize after conflict’s intensity abates, and telling the stories facilitates a vocabulary of struggle. A scholar beginning fieldwork in the fall 2019 upheavals in Ecuador asked me if I recommended field visits during or after the marches and sit ins. I confessed that the loud, flashy elements of street resistance captivated me; indeed, in my book I inset an image of an exploding trailer truck (Sadlier, 2019, p. 123), even if the wrecked vehicle offered little narrative impact. Nevertheless, subtle, meaningful gestures, through *convivencia* and the civic space noted above, often matter more to actors in

⁷ Such contentious zones of research materialize as “words mean something different across a divide [and are] transient; they arise out of encounters and interactions.” (Tsing, 2005, p. xi). In Sadlier (2019), I describe competing views of quality education, heritage and good governance in the wake of the movement of 2006 (*el movimiento de 2006*), a civil uprising to remove a state governor where teachers were key protagonists (CNTE, 2010).

⁸ I also sent a copy of Sadlier (2019) to ethnographer Susan Street, a Guadalajara, Mexico-based scholar I cited heavily but had never met in person. Street asked me to send a copy to her former dissertation chair, expanding the cycle of socio-textual connections through the book.

⁹ St. Pierre emailed me that I should write a piece like this to help future researchers, saying, “I do think that when we open up to all the ways we ‘inquire,’ to everything that counts as ‘data’ and ‘analysis,’ things just happen. The more folks who write about how this works, the better, I think! We can provide the citational authority others need to take what may seem to be risks but really aren’t” (personal communication).

¹⁰ Preparing my book via narrative inquiry (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007), where stories become their own events and not mere retracings of the past (de Certeau, 1988, p. 81), I found myself carrying around copies of Tsing (2015) and Sebald (1999).

the struggle and to me as reader and interpreter of the events. Distinct from activist research (Hale, 2012), where research processes progress in dialog with locals (p. 97), in Sadlier (2019) I had shadowed activists in a multi-sectional, decades-long struggle led by noted social researchers like Víctor Raúl Martínez Vásquez (2009) and public intellectuals like Gustavo Esteva (2007). To the teachers, however, the political action of sit-ins, marches and roadblocks often mattered less than meeting friends at protest events,¹¹ and my observations began to shift toward how teachers taught after the 2006 uprising, as seen below with the mother's stories and the storytelling workshops with Marcos and María Antonia. Even outside activist research, inquiry can help reveal and problematize the terms of a struggle,¹² the illocutionary force of telling stories on spaces touching conflict, where vocabularies have yet to take final form.¹³ In her research, Tsing (2015) finds how matsutake mushrooms thrive in public forests and industrial logging landscapes more than in controlled farming conditions, becoming a point of encounter, a “polyphonic assemblage” (p. 24), a bundle of social relationships (p. 62) where life endures tenuously. Through her narrative, we understand how matsutake united war veterans, Native Americans and Southeast Asians, often illegally foraging for it on National Park lands and selling it mindful of pricing from across Pacific Rim markets. It is up to us researchers, says Tsing, to notice and appreciate the matsutake as legitimate for us to become cognizant of the complexities of its social economy, however difficult it may be to notice agricultural systems outside of large-scale farming. For Tsing, mushroom networks mark an object of inquiry beyond mycology, providing an occasion to tell of conflict and survival. “Perhaps,” she wonders,

we need to tell and tell until our stories of death and near death and gratuitous life are standing with us to face the challenges of the present. It is in listening to that cacophony of troubled stories that we might encounter our best hopes for precarious survival. (p. 34)

Stories of conflict— like mine in Katrina and my students' in Oaxaca —make for a journey I can take into a research site, a discovery of humanizing possibilities where inattention or factualized scientific accounts predominate.

Tsing relates her troubled stories on mushroom networks by *conrading* them into clear form. She introduces mushrooming by reminding us of global trade systems familiar to readers from literature and history. Telling the story of ivory networks in the Belgian Congo, she tells the story of matsutake. Narratively, Tsing cites Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to exemplify the term “salvage accumulation” which helps explain the social networks that prosper even in the

¹¹ Teachers in Oaxaca are required by their union local to attend marches and sit ins, though they find ways of protesting this obligation, like marching without chanting (Sadlier, 2019, p. 4) and signing in an absent friend on the protest attendance sheets (p. 185).

¹² I understood teacher researchers and activists appearing in Sadlier (2019) would make greater impact in their work than I could in mine, so problematization, more than direct action, became a critical aspect of the ethnography. Koopman (2013) describes problematization as an exercise that identifies social elements in research and then excavates the meanings behind how those social elements become knowable and actionable. By problematizing, a researcher settles on the terms and networks of research, activism, pedagogy and critique. My (Sadlier, 2012, 2019) critical pedagogical exploration sought to stitch together the pedagogical encounters and problematize how those pedagogies became thinkable and doable.

¹³ In the Oaxaca uprising of 2006, meanings and alliances became known through the conflictive social processes. Beginning with teacher protests, a wider movement emerged after police repression (Esteva, 2007). Then, the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, a support organization (p. 16) defined itself as of the “people (*pueblos*),” signaling a broad social coalition and a “movement of movements” (Martínez Vásquez, 2009) against state repression (p. 330). This *pueblo* movement gathered indigenous, environmentalist, LGBT, feminist, religious and youth groups (p. 340). Within this plurality, the 2006 uprising furthermore ran on networks of “solidarity” and “fraternity” in the face of injustice (p. 338).

wreckage of capitalism, like the linkages of matsutake trade (p. 63). “Salvage accumulation through global supply chains is not new, and some well-known earlier examples can classify how it works” (p. 63). Instead of citing an expert on political economy or using her own research examples, she pulls from classic literature for the reader to perceive how ivory is sourced in central Africa and sold in Europe in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, where a character realizes his mentor lets a blood lust for ivory overtake reason. A European turning to savagery might surprise Conrad’s contemporaries who associated Europeanization with civilization; though, in Conrad, “civilization and progress turn out to be cover-ups and translation mechanisms for getting access to value procured through violence” (p. 63). The Conrad example sourcing ivory in the Congo River basin bears no direct resemblance to Tsing’s on mushrooms except that it clarifies supply chains and conflict and sets up a second paragraph, explaining salvage accumulation through Melville’s *Moby Dick*. What interests me as researcher and book manuscript preparer is how the allusions help her explain terms, outside an emic perspective of cultural insiders. Her *Heart of Darkness* and *Moby Dick* exemplify a theoretical device, salvage accumulation, for a reader better versed in literature than in mushrooming. Her conrading supply chains in this manner makes the book more approachable.

My Discourses and Mother’s Stories

For my part, when explaining terms, I lacked the nerve to conrad as Tsing did. In Sadlier (2019), when I followed teachers returning to their villages after intensified street mobilization, I removed theoretical terms I depended on in my 2012 dissertation. When making claims with terms like *discourses* (pp. 17-19), I narrated, as Tsing (2015) did, avoiding overciting expert literature or embedding clauses with drop-in descriptions. I opted to keep discourses as it helped reveal how social movements and classroom pedagogies enjoyed multiple intersectional points, conrading the term through the example of a boy, his mother and her reading children’s books with animal noises.

Discourses through a mother’s stories with animal noises began with a preamble:

In the village of Tecotitlán, I interviewed one of the elementary school mothers [who] revealed that her son had become a more autonomous reader recently, bringing books to the bathroom and reading for hours, a process that started when he heard a storyteller perform at school. The storyteller, María Antonia, often recounts with gestures and animal noises, a genre move that excited him to keep reading. (p. 18)

Then discourses come to life through an example of the boy’s literacy practices, when

one day his mother found herself reading to him when he told her to stop. She had acted out the characters in voice and gesticulation, following the storyteller, but he said that she did not need to do that. A storyteller was a storyteller, and his mother reading to him was his mother reading to him. As a novice book reader in the early grades of a rural elementary, he captured the nuances related to the right kind of delivery of fables, oral narration and his mother’s read-along practice. How he possessed and fulfilled this knowledge draws from what are known as discourses. (p. 18)

The description of discourses continues, saying

that discourses help us grapple with non-texts, silences and contexts too. This is not a mere question of logic or reason, for sometimes discourses persist because incongruities coexist or because one's knowledge of, say, storybooks and storytelling, is peripheral to directed efforts to sit down and learn the basics about storybooks; nevertheless, discourses remain clear to the person operating within them. For the story-loving elementary student, something about the theatrical presence of a storyteller—a person invited through applause, who crosses the stage before an audience of many—diverged from his mother reading to him in a smaller space, with an audience of one, sitting with a book on her lap. (p. 18)

Finally, discourses in the example comes to analysis.

No single component demarcated storyteller from mother reading, so to look at discursive elements of a social practice like reading with his mother might best be understood in terms of what the event rubs up against, like listening along with a storyteller or reading in silence. A seven-year-old story aficionado may never know for sure what a storyteller is, but he is not fooled when somebody who is not a storyteller tries to act like one. (p. 18)

In turning my Oaxaca research into a book, I lacked the self-confidence to conrad through Joseph Conrad-like examples drawn from outside my research, as Tsing (2015) had with *Heart of Darkness* and *Moby Dick*. When I held on to a term like discourses, I opted to ground examples in the site, like the storyteller's zoomorphic genre moves versus the mother who, in her son's words, should stick to a normal human voice. Like Tsing's definition of salvage accumulation through popular literature outside her corpus of research data, I conraded my key terms with elaborated examples followed by analysis.

Sebald's Oblique, Borrowed Story

Sebald conrads by a dreamy drifting into another's voice. Related to validity and reliability, Sebald's (1999) fictional jaunt takes greater perspectival license than does Tsing's (2015) ethnography of mushroom networks. *Rings* starts with the book's narrator ranging across the English countryside, feeling both liberated and dismayed, facing the anxiety of a finished project (p. 3). For our guide, the walk churns up remembrances and visions of annihilation and collapse in European wars and eroding coastlines, so that the narrator-walker at one point shuts down, becomes catatonic and wakes up in a hospital bed. Only after recovery, he tells us, does he document his walk in the *Rings of Saturn*, describing discreet details and wide-reaching histories of ideas.¹⁴ The narrator never discloses why he chose to pen this literary melancholia, full of imagination and humor, instead of leaving it unwritten. Still, he acknowledges his peripatetic process, which coincides with my own for qualitative writing in conflict settings:¹⁵ a writer finishes one project and walks their way into another; they feel liberation through discovery and feel the dread that traumatized histories bring; they

¹⁴ Sebald alerts the reader whenever someone has taken life for granted. Just after his post-walk recovery, he describes Rembrandt's "Anatomy Lesson," a painting of surgeons examining the body of a recently executed criminal, where the surgeons avoid noticing the life of the dead convict, noticing instead the anatomy, were "the appalling physical facts are reduced to diagram" (1999, p. 13). Sebald the narrator not only notices doctors' ignoring life, but he turns this indifference into narrative substance.

¹⁵ If I were to turn Sebald (1999) into a social research project, I would draw from Elyachar (2011) and Springgay and Truman (2017) on walking ethnographies.

clutch a blanket in the fetal position and then recover; they take recursive steps theorizing and documenting all the way to their completed text.

With his journey into ashes and my ethnography into social upheaval, I am surprised to note here how I identified with Sebald the Rambler better than I did with Tsing the ethnographer. Surviving Hurricane Katrina in 2005, I ended up outside Boston, where I showed a skin rash to a doctor who wondered if it had come from wading the contaminated floodwaters. A year later, I began doctoral study in Massachusetts, where sometimes I stood at classroom doorways, unwilling to enter the enclosed space and opted to keep walking. I began to follow the news of former students and colleagues in Mexico in their 2006 struggles against paramilitary raids and sniper attacks, as I progressed into my research. With my rash healed, the doorway timidity abated and the Oaxacan teachers back in their school communities, I refrained from researching New Orleans or Katrina and instead turned to authors on Oaxaca and the teacher uprising (Esteve, 2007; Martínez Vásquez, 2009; Monter, 2007), beginning my journey into teacher storylines, culminating in 2010-11 visits to sites across Mexico.

For his part, the German-born narrator in *Rings of Saturn*, describes an English countryside walk by appropriating the stories, histories and ideas of others. Conrading, the narrator meets a caretaker at a manor house, for instance, who remembers the hum of the Royal Air Force bombers departing nearby airfields across the North Sea to bomb Germany (Sebald, 1999, p. 39). Rather than a direct description of air raids, the narrator's first-person voice fuses with that of the caretaker. It is an even exchange: all but the keenest reader would need to reread the section to find the seam between the German-born walker's thoughts and the British caretaker's remembering the airplanes leveling Germany. This is Sebald's borrowed "I," where the reader does not hear a German who spent his childhood in razed cities describing allied strategic bombing, which, in turn, releases the reader from obliged empathy with the walker. The caretaker, less attached to the rubble, describes the sorties, alluding to destruction, without misery or collapse.

Sebald (1999) crisscrosses time and space further with his borrowed "I." Drawing on the narrator's free association while walking, the stories of others become the stories of the narrator. When finding lodgings in the port city of Southwold, he turns on a BBC documentary, and, dozing off, discerns the murmur of voices on television (p. 103). In a dream, he recalls Joseph Conrad in the Belgian Congo. An 18-page Conrad storyline breaks off, where, as 4-year-old, we are told, Conrad departs Poland with his mother to meet his father in Russia. Sebald's is much more of a lyrical Conrad than Tsing's, as Sebald reveals how in 1861, Conrad's father faces exile to the Russian interior,¹⁶ a boggy banishment in the "white winter and the green winter" where "in the white winter," we understand, "everything is dead," and in "green winter everything is dying" (p. 105). Here, while Tsing (2015) refers to Joseph Conrad to clarify terms, Sebald (1999) steals him outright. We catch up pages later with the young Joseph attending his father's funeral, daydreaming and then turning to adventure, we learn, sailing to Marseille and the Caribbean (pp. 109-110), meeting a lover (p. 111) and dueling (p. 112). Conrad pens a letter to an aunt in Brussels on how colonialism began to distress him (p. 117), so we hear from the Conrad of *Heart of Darkness* and of King Leopold, the "*souverain de l'État indépendant du Congo*," (p. 118). This Belgian Congo Conrad, to Sebald, begins to reckon with the dark record of the colonial enterprise in which he served (pp. 120-121). From Conrad's despondency, Sebald experiences firsthand a Belgium-wide "sepulchral" malaise, a troubling "dark Congolese secret" (p. 122). He takes the reader to Brussels—not the England of the walk, the Russia in white winter or the Congo of

¹⁶ Sebald (1999), like an ethnographer, uses the language of the people in the time and places he describes, like a "three-*verst* marsh" (p. 105), a measure of distance from imperial Russia related to Conrad's father's exile by Russian authorities of that time.

colonialism—where our narrator humorously recalls a trip where he saw more “hunchbacks” and “lunatics” than he does in the course of a year (pp. 122-123).

Through the multi-page outpouring, closing with the encounter with Brussels’ disfigured and deranged, the thoughts on our English countryside peregrination embrace the life history of Conrad, traversing languages, land borders and seas. The Sebald narrator – we cannot tell if it is a fictional or real Sebald —rests from his English walk, unable to bridle his thoughts. Forming a story of a country walk by exposing another on Conrad, our writer approaches disaster and horror. In avoiding directly told catastrophic storylines, he writes of conflict “tangentially” and “obliquely” (Sebald, 2001), according to an interview recorded a week before dying in car accident (min. 8:48). A tangential, oblique telling means an author-narrator who avoids hyperbole and who also seems unable or unwilling to describe his walk across the catastrophic without merging it with histories, journeys and jocularities that belong to other people and to bygone ages. Conrading in Tsing (2015) may be telling stories of local practices through far off examples and contexts, but Sebald’s (1999) conrading becomes a play on speaker perspective across landscapes of annihilation. The footfall of a country pilgrimage becomes an act of trespassing through the reminders of fire-bombings and bondage. Walking alongside the walker, we glean, only partially, how he needs the accompaniment of another person’s troubled story for him to share us his, just as I did while preparing *Movements on the streets and in Schools*, and as I attempt to do here with in the exercise that culminates in this piece.

Movements through Storms and Milk

I conraded more liberally in the *Movements* (Sadlier, 2019) monograph for a wider audience than I had seven years earlier in the Sadlier (2012) dissertation written for a four-person committee. In the book, I spent more effort narrating how people used the stories of others than I had in my dissertation, a book chapter (Sadlier, 2014) and research articles (O’Donnell & Sadlier, 2018; Sadlier, 2016). I also centered on how teachers returned to their rural school communities and carried on their pedagogical work in the wake of anti-repression social mobilization on the city streets. In the school community of the mother using animal gestures and sounds, I noticed how Marcos, a teacher I shadowed, borrowed others’ first-person perspectives. Four years after enduring the 2006 incursion of the *Policía Federal Preventiva* (federal police) into the city and meeting a storyteller in the melee,¹⁷ Marcos hired María Antonia to the school to tell stories. Parents had at first refused the absentee teachers’ reentry into school, by lock and chain, until Marcos and his colleagues promised higher quality teaching, which featured a reading project (Sadlier, 2019, pp. 79-80). The teachers contracted María Antonia, among others, for her use of the human voice to turn stories from sonic to print literacy.

Below is an excerpt of both Marcos and María Antonia introducing storytelling to a group of mothers and grandmothers in the village school, a prelude to a workshop on family histories. Marcos and María Antonia stand at one end of an egg-shaped ellipsis of chairs under a tarpaulin in the school basketball court and begin to speak.

Marcos and María Antonia each related snapshots of a bygone meeting with an elder. First, Marcos narrated an instance riding on a bicycle crossbar with his father cycling to market, the grade-school Marcos protected by his father’s strong limbs as they raced the darkening clouds of an approaching rainstorm.

¹⁷ Facing the federal police, a festive performance stirred in downtown Oaxaca City, November 2006. There, Marcos invited a performer to his rural elementary school to tell stories, which began the Marcos’s inviting storytellers from as far as Argentina, including the Mexico City-based María Antonia.

With a clear destination at the market, and in the race against a pluvial menace, Marcos related the youthful, sheltered exploration he undertook with his father as the rains overtook them. Pedagogically, Marcos's story scaffolded his asking us at the workshop to clarify the bicycle's color in our mind's eye, as if the bike were just a bike until the recall of color delivered it into its experiential wholeness. His father's disused bike stored at Marcos's house triggered reverie, and stories like the rainstorm ride remained for him a living point of access with his father when seeing the bicycle. (Sadlier, 2019, pp. 93-94)

Like Sebald recounting his walk in the present day by explaining the journeys of Conrad in days gone by, I describe María Antonia telling hers "through sensual impulses like the horizontal morning sun catching the dust of a barn and the warm sweet smell of milk drawn right from the cow," a

blurry and mysterious tableau [which] came out faster as she concluded, almost as if she were dreaming and knew that very soon, she would awaken and the wholeness of the oblique rays of the morning sun would vanish. Like Marcos's, her story felt exploratory and infantile, though without safety or companionship that I could as a listener identify. At our event, María Antonia had already established herself as a master storyteller before us, spinning fables on the stage now behind her, and now via the barn reverie she appeared indifferent to the listener as she soliloquized the memory's uninhabited, excessive details. (p. 94)

María Antonia concludes with confessing that the barn story began before her birth, from her mother's upbringing. If the story's actual origin drew from beyond her authentic, rational experience, it mattered little to the way María Antonia took ownership of it.

Her anachronistic and wistful delivery later helped her reveal how the barn milking came [from] her octogenarian mother's actual experience. Perhaps it was her mother's experience; though, her mother having told the story to the storyteller, María Antonia had inserted herself into it, she emphasized. Whoever possessed the authentic memory of the real event, none could tell, she concluded. No one harnesses total or final rights to stories; the truthfulness of the prior events retold is no match for the truth that the performer gives them. (p. 94)

Taken together, in the Marcos and María Antonia reveries, the present matters as much as the past. Both narratives scaffold narration-building in the workshop, setting up the experience of family stories, oftentimes seen as not worthy of school knowledge, as legitimate and detail rich. Marcos reminds us of a rainy-season ritual during this rainy-season workshop—handling oncoming storms while riding on narrow tires on dirt roads. Marcos is no longer the embraced child, but he still lives with the bicycle ride with his father, even with the bicycle itself, which is in Marcos's possession. Like Marcos's, María Antonia's tale coalesces through the teller herself, present at this event. The historical fact of this story coming from the teller's mother's memory matters little in its impact. As I write this, I also remember the exact image the stories gave me at this event almost a decade ago.

Borrowed Perspectives in Storied Conflicts

I came to my doctoral research project on Oaxaca-based pedagogies after surviving Hurricane Katrina.¹⁸ Aware that approaches to researching ongoing conflict and disaster are underdeveloped in education, outside of clinical and ameliorative ones,¹⁹ my post-disaster research focused on the intersections of social movements and classroom teaching, culminating in a book, Sadlier (2019). Neither my own displacement and participant observation in teaching and protests across Mexico, nor my published articles primed me to consider traces of conflict emerging during manuscript preparation. Echoing the social movement literature on the 2006 Oaxaca uprising (Martínez Vásquez, 2009; Monter, 2007), horizontality (Sitrin, 2006) and Latina feminist practices of *convivencia* (Trinidad Galván, 2015) and translation (Thayer, 2010), in preparing Sadlier (2019), I clung to texts out of social necessity, independent of their use in my description or analysis. The present article describes the social and intertextual process of turning conflict-site doctoral research into a book manuscript, with a pointed focus on my sustained interaction with two books on the catastrophic: Tsing (2015), *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, a non-fiction ethnography on the socio-economy of mushrooms in human-transformed landscapes and, Sebald (1999), *The Rings of Saturn*, a fictional novel about an author's pilgrimage and reflections on the histories of ideas, human cruelty and social collapse.

Preparing the sole-author manuscript in Sadlier (2019) intersected, uneasily, with the memories of collective street-level social mobilization in my fieldwork. I found it unfeasible to return to a storyline of conflict by direct, objective engagement with the data. Thus, I deployed a more narrative than fact-probing approach, partly out of respect for the story-based modality of my social relations with the teachers and partly from a desire to build a relationship with the reader to suggest that my story stood as one story among others.²⁰ I advanced in my telling of a troubled story, while finding in Tsing (2015) and Sebald (1999) two authors telling troubled stories. This reflective piece has discussed how I observed and eventually deployed the strategy of conrading, an intertextual approach Tsing (2015) and Sebald (1999) used to draw on the lives of Joseph Conrad and other personalities from outside their direct line of inquiry. Tsing and Sebald reveal no ingrained geographic or intellectual fealty with Joseph Conrad, yet Tsing conraded with her theoretical terms, Sebald in his characters' first-person voice. In Sadlier (2019), I set down fieldwork-derived illustrations to explain my terms and told stories about others telling stories. I conraded in my keeping dog-eared copies of Tsing (2015) and Sebald (1999) throughout manuscript preparation, culminating a 13-year journey from Hurricane Katrina floodwaters in New Orleans, to doctoral study on dry Massachusetts land and to southeastern Mexico-based teacher resistance. Assembling the chapters of my book stirred in me a desire to hold fast to the finished books by authors I admired. I reached for Tsing and Sebald, among other scholars in my field like Elizabeth St. Pierre, because I sensed that as solo author of Sadlier (2019), I misrepresented the social networks that thrived throughout the research process. I appreciated how Tsing (2015) and Sebald (1999) gracefully merged their scripted words with the spoken words and lived worlds of others, telling stories

¹⁸ In 2005 when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, I evacuated north and took up doctoral studies at the University of Massachusetts. As a Katrina evacuee, I connected with survivors of natural and human-made catastrophe; more pertinent, I reached out to former students facing repressive violence in the 2006 teacher uprising in Oaxaca, Mexico. Between summer 2010 and spring 2011, I accepted the teachers' invitation to carry out fieldwork in this southeastern region of Mexico where I had lived for much of the 1990s.

¹⁹ See Carello and Butler (2014) for trauma-informed teaching and learning.

²⁰ In Sadlier (2019), I pieced together one story in the broad pages above and another in the chapter endnotes. I inserted a photograph in the endnotes, defending the decision with the production editor by saying that the notes were not peripheral. Instead, they suggested an equally valid storyline that might have become the main one had circumstances evolved differently.

of cutover forests and eroded seaside bluffs, and I answered St. Pierre's challenge to write about how this mattered in manuscript preparation.

Though I might consider my holding the supple pages of the Tsing and Sebald texts like handling prayer beads or a worry stone, the texts proved more than talismanic. As a researcher, concluding a project's cycle with manuscript assembly, I worked through the anxiety and isolation to become more cognizant of the impact of rendering empirical data into narrative rather than through objective findings. Researching social movements and venturing into dangerous spaces, in this view, persists after fieldwork. With social movement actors in the research facing the physical danger of sniper fire and turning to horizontalism and convivencia, I sought refuge in the words of other storytellers like Tsing and Sebald and now take seriously the challenge of St. Pierre to follow up by writing the present piece. Just as narrating through stories of precarious survival became for me a germane and affectively relevant strategy, researcher self-care might be equally important when working across spaces hit by global health crises, by militarized police and paramilitary forces and by the collapse of public institutions.²¹ If so, I suggest that research, from proposal to manuscript preparation, reveal how that vulnerability generates social and textual relationships.

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²¹ See Bonet and McWilliams (2019) for a reflection on ethnographers taking care of their hearts and minds when continuing to research among the traumatized.

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